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BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE.

No. MCCLXXVII. MARCH 1922. Vol. CCXI.

MURDER DISQUALIFIES.

BY ALAN GRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

"WANTED.—Ex-officer, gallant and daring, to lead *desperate enterprise*. Good pay assured, and rich reward when goal is attained. Must be tall, strong, handsome, and of a romantic nature. Apply by letter, enclosing photograph, to—Box 002."

"Bubbly, am I handsome and of a romantic nature?" demanded Neil McNeil, glancing up from the paper with a humorous twist to his mouth.

"Hic," replied the Honourable Thomas Owen with difficulty.

He was writing the weekly lay sermon of the 'Better Land'—a sermon that thousands of innocent and pious subscribers would swallow with gusto on the ensuing Sunday—and he disliked interruption. McNeil and Maggie Lingford—the nominal editress—had propped him up on a pile of dusty back numbers, stuck a pen in his hand, and conveyed to him, with difficulty, what was required of him. He never wrote his weekly sermon sober. He said that it required two gallons of beer to compensate him for the moral degradation of perpetrating such slosh. At the moment of McNeil's interruption sentimental tears trickled from his bloodshot eyes as he scribbled some more than usually sugary platitude.

Neil McNeil looked at him with a smile, in which amusement was blended with pity and disgust.

"Look at him, Maggie," he said, with a wave of his hand.

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"If only 'Life-long Abstainer,' or 'Truly Penitent,' or any other of your letter-bag friends could see him now, where would the circulation be?—Bubbly, you crapulous wine-bibber, stop casting your pearls before—our readers for a moment, and give me your candid opinion—am I handsome and of a romantic disposition?"

The Honourable Thomas Owen looked up blearily from his task. He was small, shabby, and unshaven, his sandy hair and incipient beard lending him a weak, effeminate air that was intensified by the glistening on his cheek of the maudlin tears compounded of cheap beer and cheaper sentiment. Yet was he no fool, but a journalist who could place his copy where he pleased. He was recognised in Fleet Street as a standing authority on all matters of sport, and his articles were in continuous request. As he was without ambition, and as his desires did not go beyond beer, he rarely wrote unless he was thirsty and had not the wherewithal to quench his thirst.

The lay sermon for the 'Better Land' was a labour of love. Maggie Lingford, who had obtained the position of editor by sheer bluff, had not the experience to carry the job through, and had begged him, as an old friend, to come to her aid. Each Monday night therefore Bubbly appeared, exhaling the fumes of beer, and helped with the make-up of the paper.

Neil McNeil was in a different category. A demobilised officer with no resources, he had drifted to Fleet Street and picked up a livelihood by such vicarious journalism as the kindness of a notedly generous profession could help him to. He had done work that Owen should have done at times, and had accompanied him to the musty office of the 'Better Land,' where Maggie Lingford had taken compassion on him and permitted him to collect religious snippets from the daily papers for her own pages.

Bubbly looked up at McNeil stupidly. His mind was still working in terms of "be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever," and he hiccupped plaintively. McNeil leant across the table and shook him.

"Wake up, wake up, old thing," he said, as he swayed the unfortunate to and fro at the imminent risk of displacing the pile of 'Better Lands' on which he was propped precariously. "What of my beauty and romance?"

"You've disart-hic-ulated my train of thought," said Owen sadly. "Wot you want?"

McNeil pushed his paper under the other's eyes.

"Read," he said dramatically.

There was silence as the Honourable Thomas puzzled his way through the "agony."

"D'you mean to 'nsinuate that you—*you*—contemplate an appl-hic-ation for thish job?"

he asked thickly, when at last the meaning of the advertisement had penetrated to his brain.

"Why not?" demanded McNeil. "I meet all the requirements, don't I?"

Owen looked round at Maggie Lingford appealingly, and waved a grubby hand towards McNeil.

"I ask you, Maggie, I ask you. *Is* he handsome?"

"Of course he is," she answered over-emphatically, with a woman's unnecessary fear of hurting a man's feelings.

McNeil turned on her a pleasant and comprehending smile.

"You needn't be afraid, old girl," he said easily. "I'm not a bit sensitive about my mug. In fact, I'm rather proud of it."

"It doesn't disfigure you a bit," replied the girl uncomfortably.

Major McNeil had had the misfortune to receive some fragments of shell in his face during the advance of September 1918, and the doctors, with all their skill, had not succeeded in removing traces of the wounds. The scars did not add to his beauty, yet there was nothing repulsive about the damaged face. Indeed, one had only to know the man to forget their existence. His merry twinkling eyes and jolly smile were in themselves enough good looks for any man.

"The point is," went on the Honourable Thomas obstinately, "whatever *you* may think of your mug, you won't get the imbecile who wrote this balderdash to agree with you. It's a wash-out, my gallant hicx-officer."

"Let me see," said Maggie Lingford, taking the paper from the speaker's hand.

Like the good unimaginative girl that she was, Maggie took the advertisement much more seriously than did either of the others. The humorous side of it did not occur to her.

"Oh, Neil," she cried as she finished, "you must write at once. You're the very man they want. I'm sure there's a fortune waiting for the man who gets it. But I do hope it's not really dangerous. You *must* write. Make him, Bubbly."

"Don't forget the photograph, old girl," said Owen, who was now thoroughly roused to an understanding of the conversation. "When she sees it, he hasn't an earthly."

"She? What makes you think it's a she?"

"Heavens! It's written all over the thing in letters that he who runs a Rolls-Royce may read."

"It certainly has the feminine touch," agreed Neil. "I'm afraid it's no good. In any case, in all probability it's a hoax."

"I don't believe it," insisted the editor of the 'Better Land,' and with some logic added: "If you are right about it being a woman it can't be a hoax. No woman would bother."

"There's something in that," agreed Owen, with a maudlin

chuckle. "Women don't specialise in humour. I think the circulation of the 'Better Land' must be mainly feminine. I must get on with my sermon."

"Wait a minute, Bubbly," said Maggie Lingford, bright-eyed. "Have you got a photograph of yourself before you were wounded, Neil?"

"I have. All done up in uniform too. I see what you mean, Maggie; but it would only make things worse when she sees me as I am now."

"Not a bit of it," cried the girl excitedly. "If you are right—if it is a woman—when she sees you after she has seen your photograph, she will—she—she. . . ."

"I know," said McNeil, with the first hint of bitterness in his voice. "She will be overcome with maudlin sentiment and fall on my neck. I don't think it's worth it."

"I dunno. I believe Maggie's on a good egg," said the Honourable Thomas, rousing from a relapse into the state of semi-imbecility in which he composed his lay sermons. "Have a shot at it. Le' me write the letter. Can't do any harm, an' if the deal comes off, I take ten per cent comm–hic–sion. Wot d'ye say?"

He looked up with a half-humorous, half-dazed expression, and glanced from one to the other expectantly.

McNeil laughed.

"Go ahead, Bubbly," he said. "Let's see what you would make of it if *you* were in the running."

The Honourable Thomas Owen tore off the page upon which he had been scribbling his sermon, and his fluent pen ran over the blank sheet without a pause or hesitation.

"Madam," he wrote, "your appeal goes to my heart. What can I say of myself? Would you have me boast of my prowess? Would I answer to your need did I do so? No. I have fought through the war. I have been wounded in my country's service. I have risen to field rank through my own efforts. I have been cast aside like a soiled glove. Need I say more? No. *You* will understand. Whatever the danger, whatever the risk, think of me as one ready to dare all, to stake all, on one throw in your service. I enclose my photograph."

"And if that doesn't fetch her, the whole damn thing's a fraud," declared Bubbly with a final hiccup.

"You don't imagine for a moment that I'd send in tosh like that?" said McNeil indignantly. "If you do, you are more hopelessly inebriated than I gave you credit for, Bubbly."

"Oh, Neil, it isn't tosh," protested Maggie Lingford. "It's a beautiful letter."

"You see," said the Honourable Thomas, with a complacent smile, "it appeals to *her*. How much more will it go home to the romant–hic heart of the advertiser. Come on, Neil, make a fair copy, and let me get on with Maggie's sermon."

He threw the rough copy across to McNeil, and busied himself in his task.

McNeil hesitated. He read through the letter and grinned at its absurdity, then crumpled it into a ball and threw it upon the floor. Maggie Lingford pounced upon it immediately and straightened it out again.

"Neil, do send it in," she said beseechingly. "I'm sure it is your chance in life. You know you'll never do any good in journalism. You're not—not dissipated enough, nor unprincipled enough. You *must* try to get out of it."

"But, hang it, Peg, if the advertiser is the kind of ass who would swallow tosh like that, I'm better grubbing in Fleet Street."

"Send it in, Neil. It's your chance in life, I'm sure of it," reiterated the girl.

Maggie Lingford, pale, plain, and untidy, had a heart of gold. Thrown early upon her own resources, she had fought sternly for her living without losing her natural kindliness, which accounts for the readiness of Owen and others to come to her assistance in a job that was beyond her capacity. McNeil felt the real earnestness of her appeal—knew that it arose from a genuine sympathy for him—and, with no other aim than to please her, agreed to make the application.

He made a fair copy of Bubbly's bombastic composition on a plain sheet of paper, heading it with the address of the shabby rooms that he was temporarily sharing with the Honourable Thomas Owen. He chuckled as he wrote at the absurdity of the whole affair.

"There," he said, as he signed his name with the flourish that seemed in keeping with the composition. "If you two land me in Colney Hatch between you, I hope you'll have the decency to get me out."

At that same moment Owen wound up his sermon.

"And that's that," he said disgustedly. "Better order a few thousand hic-stra copies this week, Maggie. This muck's going to twist their heart-strings. There's tears in it, my lass."

As he spoke he wiped traces of his own maudlin tears from his unshaven cheeks, while Maggie Lingford hastily ran through the copy.

"It's just *lovely*, Bubbly," she said, with a real awe in her voice. "And it's all so true!"

A wild ironical laugh broke from the little man as he slipped unsteadily from the dusty pile of papers and steadied himself by the table.

"True!" he cried disgustedly. "Of course it's true. There isn't an idea in it that hasn't been chewed over and chewed over for the past four thousand years. Come on, Neil; Maggie can do without us now. My whole being cries out for good honest beer."

"And you will post the letter, Neil?" asked Maggie, as her friends made to leave.

"I promise," replied McNeil with a careless laugh. "The photograph which is to bowl the lady over is among my kit at the digs. I'll look it out after I've seen Bubbly properly sewn up, and have carted him home. Good-night, Maggie."

"Good-night, and thank you ever so," replied the girl gratefully.

As they stumbled down the dark staircase, with its noisy wooden treads and awkward turns, the Honourable Thomas Owen urged his companion on with the desperation of a soul in anguish. His need was indeed great, for he had spent two hours in pure philanthropy, which should have been allotted to the quenching of his thirst.

CHAPTER II.

Three days later the answer came.

McNeil, shaven and dressed, burst into the grubby bedroom where the Honourable Thomas Owen lay in a cloud of acrid smoke running through the sporting news of half a dozen of the morning papers.

"Bubbly," he cried, his face alight with excitement and amusement, "she's written."

The sluggard looked up from his occupation grumpily.

"You jar me horrid, my lad," he grumbled. "What care I for your insanitary love affairs? Run away and leave me to the sorrows that are mine. Are they not enough? Look!"

He pointed to a badly-printed column in a picture paper with all the air of a tragedian.

"Jack Whittle has cut out the most poetical bit of stuff that's ever been written about a prize-fight. It was great, my boy; and he's blue-pencilled the lot."

"Never mind, Bubbly. You can use it for some other fight. Listen to this. It's the answer to the letter you composed for me."

"Oh, that. She bit, then? I thought it would fetch her."

"It fetched her all right. Listen.

"'SIR,—Your letter went to my heart. Something tells me that you are the man I seek. If danger does not deter you, come to me to-morrow between ten and twelve, so that I may judge you in the flesh. Knock twice — first loudly, then softly—and to her who opens say, "To the death." Meanwhile, be discreet, for a mere breath may ruin my cause.—Till we meet.'

"No signature. What do you think of it, Bubbly? Pink paper, reeking of Heaven knows what foul perfume. An address in Bayswater that looks opulent enough. Some romantic servant girl, film mad, and looking for a lover, eh?"

"Not a bit of it, my boy. There's more in it than that. God! Why am not I handsome and daring? There's a fortune in it," grinned the Honourable Thomas from behind his dirty counterpane. "Neil, you're a lucky devil. You'll marry her in the end. Hence the desperate enterprise referred to in the advertisement."

"Hang it, you don't think I'm going on with this melodramatic rot, do you?" said McNeil disgustedly. "This 'knock softly, then loudly,' and 'to the death' business."

"If you don't, damme, I'll go myself," retorted Owen. "It's a scoop for a needy journalist. But you'll have to see it through. You promised Maggie Lingford."

"So I did," agreed the other ruefully. "Well, the sooner I go the sooner it will be over. It's nearly ten now. If I'm not back by evening, Bubbly, you can put the police on my track."

The Honourable Thomas chuckled maliciously.

"You meant to go all along, you dog," he declared. "But you had to protect yourself from ridicule by getting me to bring you to the scratch."

Neil McNeil's smile was practically an admission.

"I thought so," said Owen, interpreting it as such, and grinning elfishly from amongst his litter of papers.

He looked like a mischievous sprite rather than a man as he lay huddled with his pinched face peering over the counterpane, the more so when contrasted with his friend, upright at the foot of the bed.

McNeil was over six feet in height, though his fine proportions made him look less. He had a way of holding his head—slightly thrown back, with square chin thrust forward—that gave him a faint air of aggression. His face was shaven clean, and the scars upon it gave it a rugged appearance that fitted well with his carriage. His eyes were blue-grey, wide-set, and steady, so that one looking into them felt that here was a man who could be trusted in any emergency. The Honourable Thomas Owen expressed the idea well when he said that he always felt like getting into trouble when with McNeil, because he was so confident that his friend would get him out again.

McNeil went west by tube and found himself in Bayswater at half-past ten, well within the prescribed limits. He admitted to himself a growing curiosity and excitement as he approached the heart of the mystery. A polite constable directed him to Wellesley Square, which he found to consist of opulent-looking houses overlooking the usual railed-in shrubberies and well-kept lawn. It was early April, and the budding trees and shrubs still wore the freshness of their new-born leaves.

McNeil looked upon the scene with approval. It suggested

the capacity to pay well for services rendered. He walked round three sides of the square in search of number fourteen, the address given by his mysterious correspondent. He had reached it and ascended several of the steps that led to the front door, when a voice called him from behind—

"Hey, I say."

McNeil turned and saw behind him upon the pavement a striking figure. It was that of a man fully as tall as himself, dressed in a rough tweed suit of a hot reddish-brown with a violent yellow check running through it. Though loud in tone it was well cut, and its occupant was the kind of man who could wear with distinction what would have been grotesque on another. He was broad-shouldered and slender in the hips, and bore himself like a man accustomed to have his own way. The face that looked up from beneath a rather wide-brimmed soft hat was framed in a fiery red beard, and the eyes that were fixed on McNeil were lightish-green and piercing, yet with a hint of saturnine humour in their depths and in the fan-like creases at their corners. There was a rakish dare-devil look about the man that would have made him noticeable anywhere, apart from his size. In age he might have been from thirty-five to fifty.

McNeil looked at him inquiringly from the vantage-ground of the steps.

"Ay. It was you I hailed, young man," said the stranger. "I saw you turn up the steps, and I fancied you might enlighten me as to the tenant of the house."

The voice was somewhat harsh, though cultured, and McNeil thought he detected in the accent a trace of his own nationality.

"I'm afraid I can't help you," he said.

"You can hardly be certain of that until you hear what I want to know," said the man with the red beard drily. "Does Signorina Francesca Marinetti live here?"

"I don't know," replied McNeil shortly, annoyed by the stranger's persistence.

"Yet I find you mounting the steps with all the assurance of a friend of the family," said the other, eyeing McNeil boldly from beneath tufted red-brown eyebrows.

"I may be delivering handbills," retorted McNeil, taking up the challenge in the stranger's tone.

"Aye, ye may," agreed redbeard with the glint of a smile on his mouth and in his green eyes. "And again ye may not. The latter, I should guess. Well, if you won't help me, I must e'en ask elsewhere. Good-morning to you, sir, and a thousand thanks for your courtesy."

He turned his broad shoulders and strolled slowly off. McNeil mounted the steps with a slight frown on his brow. It might be coincidence, of course, but it seemed strange that he

should have this encounter on the very threshold of his adventure. The recollection of the instructions he had received drove the stranger from his mind, however. He knocked loudly, then gently, with all a Scotsman's self-conscious fear of appearing absurd. Worst of all, he dreaded the utterance of the ridiculous password. His throat went dry, and he moistened his lips with his tongue as he thought of it, and at that moment the door opened silently and a pair of coal-black eyes set in an olive face stared into his.

Startled by the suddenness of the apparition, McNeil blurted out "To the death" loudly, instead of muttering it in the true tone of a conspirator. Had he had time to look round, he would have discovered that his friend of the red beard had turned on his tracks and come slowly back. He was passing the entrance to number fourteen at the very moment that McNeil uttered the password.

Of this, however, the latter remained ignorant, for the door swung more fully open and the dark-skinned maid invited him, by a gesture, to enter. The door closed quickly behind him, and without a word spoken, the woman moved forward across the brightly-furnished hall, inviting him, by a wave of the hand, to follow. McNeil followed, conscious that he was acting the part of a fool. He might be walking into any kind of a trap.

She tapped softly, almost reverently, upon a door at the distant end of the hall.

"Come in," replied a voice which, in its richness, muted though it was by the closed door, sent a thrill down McNeil's spine.

The woman opened the door silently and signed to him to enter.

There was something in the silence and the reverence of this dark-skinned girl that communicated itself to McNeil, so that he crossed the threshold of the room treading softly as one entering a cathedral.

"Ah! You have come. I knew that you would not fail me."

The door had already closed behind him, and he was alone with the possessor of this rich full voice that seemed to make the very air around him vibrate. There was something faintly un-English in the way the words were spoken, yet the pronunciation was almost faultless, and there was even something strangely familiar to McNeil in the intonation.

His eyes followed the direction of the sound, and he found himself looking at the back of a woman who was seated at a small table laid with a white cloth and all the paraphernalia of a meal. She had called her greeting without turning round, and, even as McNeil looked, she raised a glass containing a black fluid to her lips, and drained the contents. Then she rose gracefully and turned to meet him face to face.

Never had McNeil seen so beautiful a woman. Great masses of black hair, deep and rich as the blackness of velour, crowned her head. Her great eyes shone like glowing coals as she turned them on her visitor. Her face was full and uniformly pale, yet with a pallor that had in it nothing of fragility, and her full lips, slightly parted, seemed intensely carmine by contrast. She wore a loose morning wrap of jade green embroidered in gold that fell from her deep full breast to her feet, and made her appear taller even than she was. As she turned she stretched out her hands in a gesture of welcome, and the wide sleeves fell back disclosing her rounded white arms, on one of which above the elbow glowed a great hoop of old gold and rubies.

McNeil had little time for admiration, however, for at her first glance she started back dramatically, her beautifully-marked eyebrows lowered and the whole face changed from welcome to fury.

"What is this?" she demanded, her voice falling to a low deep note of accusation. "You are not he who wrote. Who are you? Ah, fine I ken. You are in the pay of my uncle. If you have murdered that poor man who would have served me, and stolen the password from his corpse, I will see that he is revenged. I swear it."

She paused for breath, and McNeil hastened to explain.

"Madam," he began hesitatingly, for he was embarrassed by the exuberance of her attack, "there is a misunderstanding, for which I am to blame. I am—the photograph I sent you—is me, but it was taken early in the war. I had an accident at the front, and it has altered my appearance considerably. Believe me, I am the Major McNeil who wrote to you. If, however, my altered appearance renders me unsuited to the work you have to offer, I will bid you good-morning and offer you my apologies for troubling you."

As he spoke, the expression on the beautiful face before him changed like a dissolving view. The passion faded gradually as his words conveyed their meaning to her, and in its place dawned pity and remorse. The great dark eyes filled slowly with glistening tears, and the expressive mouth drooped pathetically.

"O—h!" The sound was a long, low, melodious cry of distress, and before McNeil realised what was about to happen to him, soft fingers were caressing the scars upon his face, and a beautiful voice murmured broken words of sympathy so closely to him that the breath of them fanned his rugged face. A faint odour of stout drifted to his nostrils.

"Oh, but I am stupid, so stupid. How my cruel words must have seared your heart! I should have thought—but it is my way to act and to think afterwards."

Gently McNeil took the caressing hands from his face and disengaged himself.

"Please don't worry," he said, smiling at the absurdity of the whole affair. "I'm not a bit sensitive about my face, I assure you. In fact, to be candid, I think it's not half bad as faces go."

The girl—for she was little more—changed her mood as abruptly as before. With a gleam of white teeth her face lit up in a bewitching smile, and then, throwing back her wonderful head, she broke into a merry laugh that rang through the room like a peal of bells. It was so spontaneous and infectious that McNeil could not but join in it.

When it was over the man and the woman stood smiling at one another like old friends. Through McNeil's mind floated the thought of Maggie Lingford and her prophecy.

"Trust a woman to know a woman, even if she has never seen her," he thought. Assuredly he had got over the difficulty of his scars readily enough. He had little time for meditation, however.

"Now that you have seen me, you know who I am?" asked the lady, with an air of importance.

McNeil shook his head.

"I'm afraid I——"

"But every one knows me. Hoots, man, you *must* know me."

McNeil realised at last what it was that had seemed familiar in her speech. Though she had a noticeably foreign accent, particularly in the throaty roll of her r's, he recognised in her words and in the turns of her speech something that was distinctly Scotch. It was a curious, yet rather a fascinating mixture.

He reaffirmed his ignorance, with profound apologies, and the lady frowned, hurt in her *amour propre*.

"But surely," she cried petulantly, "every one knows Francesca Marinetti, the Corsican contralto! Have not kings and emperors bowed before me? Yet you say you do not know. Awa' wi' you!"

"I apologise again, madame," said McNeil, amused by her vehemence. "I recollect now that I have seen your name on the opera bills, but I—well, I have had to work hard recently to earn a mere living, and opera is a closed book to me."

"Poor man!" cried Signorina Marinetti, her ready sympathy to the fore again. "I am thoughtless and cruel. You will forgive me?"

She advanced appealingly with outstretched arms, and McNeil began to fear a repetition of her caresses, when there came a knock upon the door.

Immediately it opened abruptly, and there stood framed in the doorway McNeil's acquaintance of a few minutes earlier—the man with the red beard.

CHAPTER III.

Francesca Marinetti stepped back with a cry of rage.

"You!" she exclaimed, her hands clenched together on her bosom, her eyes glowing with the fury of a wild animal.

"Ay," said the intruder calmly. "I hope I find you in the best of health, niece?"

Nothing could have been greater than the contrast between these two. She, dark and passionate, swayed without restraint by the emotion of the moment; he, with his flaming beard and hair, his cynical green eyes, his air of command over his feelings.

"I've had the de'il's own job in getting a personal interview," he went on serenely. "But for the affability of your friend here, who kindly gave me the password, I might have——"

"You lie," interrupted McNeil angrily. "I refused you any information at all."

"In your innocence and simplicity you bawled it out for the world to hear. It's the same thing," said red-beard, with a smile of mingled triumph and contempt for McNeil. "Anyhow, niece, here I am, and if you will release this gentleman from attendance at your court, we can chat over our family affairs comfortably and without heat."

Signorina Marinetti had been silent so far rather from an extremity of rage than from desire. She stood, clenching and unclenching her hands, her face like an emblem of fury. At last she found words.

"Go," she cried, and even in her passion her voice retained its rare beauty. "I will have nothing to do with you. Fine I ken what you want. You would rob me of my inheritance. Fine I ken the meaning of your letters and your requests for an interview. Do not leave me, Major McNeil, and if he will not go of his own free will, you shall do your first service for me by throwing him in the street. You hear me?"

The last words were hurled at the man who called her niece, and he smiled coolly as he answered her.

"I hear you, my lass. My faculties are still as perfect as a poor frail mortal can hope for, and it would be a very deaf man who could fail to hear you. As for throwing me in the street"—here he eyed McNeil superciliously,—"I'm getting on in years, but I fancy my chance. You'd best send the laddie away before he gets hurt, and talk things over like a sensible woman. If you had more of your mother and less of your Corsican father about you, we'd soon come to terms."

He spoke without heat, like a man anxious to gain his end by reasonable means, but the girl was not to be cajoled.

"Leave me," she cried, almost beside herself with rage.

"I know what you want, and I will not discuss it with you. You would have me sell my birthright for a mess of pottage. I will not bargain with you. Go, before you are thrown out."

Then, as the unwelcome visitor showed no sign of obeying, she turned swiftly upon McNeil.

"You are my champion," she said dramatically. "I leave him in your hands."

For McNeil it was a moment of supreme embarrassment. He knew nothing of the lady whom he was expected to champion, except that she was beautiful beyond all women whom he had known, and that she spoke with the voice of an angel. On the other hand, he had taken the measure of the man with the red beard, and had realised that, if it came to a tussle, it was an even chance if he went under or threw his man out. A vulgar altercation in a lady's private room went against all his instincts, yet he knew that the moment had arrived when he must take a side, or make his exit from the mysterious drama for ever.

There was no time for consideration. He must make his decision upon the instant, and, manlike, he let beauty and a sweet voice conquer discretion. He constituted himself, definitely, the lady's champion.

"You have heard what Signorina Marinetti said," he began suavely, for he could not resist a certain feeling of attraction towards the virile being who confronted him smilingly. "If it comes to a rough-and-tumble either of us may win, but assuredly, even if you come out on top, you won't be in a condition to appreciate the interview you desire. Don't you think it would be better for you to clear out at once? You're not a bit popular here, you know."

The man with the red beard looked at McNeil long and steadily, sizing him up shrewdly.

"I still fancy my chance," he said at last, with a humorous twist to his mouth. "And if a man of my age and proved sobriety might dare to prophesy, I'll be spared to prove my words on your carcase yet, my bonnie lad. But there's a deal of honest sense in what you say. We'll postpone the fisticuffs till another day." Then, turning abruptly to his niece, he continued, "As for you, my bairn, I've made you a fair offer. Three times have I written it to you, and not a word would you answer. I take God to be my witness—if it's not too much of a liberty—that I've given you every chance, and now you must just e'en hoe your own row. Good morning to you—both."

With a comprehensive bow and a smile that never lost its self-possession, the man with the red beard backed to the door, opened it, and was gone.

McNeil, left alone with Francesca Marinetti, stood embarrassed and bewildered, awaiting

enlightenment. Whatever the job might be, he felt that he had already secured it, did he care to accept it. The incident that had just closed, however, convinced him that the affair was serious, and not merely a tempestuous woman's whim, as he had been inclined at first to think.

"Come, Major McNeil," said the lady, turning upon him a face expressive of exaggerated gratitude, "you have proved your loyalty already. It was fortunate that that wretch—my uncle—came when he did. Now we are at open war, and you must be on my side. You'll stand by me, will ye no'?"

She laid a beseeching hand upon his arm, and her dark eyes looked up pleadingly into his, as she bent towards him gracefully. McNeil felt the impulse strong in him to commit himself irrevocably, but his Scottish caution came to the rescue.

"Tell me," he said, gently disengaging himself, "what is it you want me to do?"

"Oh, you are cold—cold," she cried petulantly. "Can you not be my champion on trust?"

McNeil smiled and shook his head.

"Please do not blame me," he said. "Remember I am only a poor man in search of work."

For a moment the lady's mood hovered between an outbreak of anger and a disdainful coldness, and then it changed fascinatingly to smiling acquiescence.

"You are right," she said. "You canna be expected to buy a pig in a poke. Come, join me at breakfast. I had not finished when you arrived."

She sat down again at the small table, and poured the remainder of a bottle of stout into her glass.

"What shall I get for you? Beer, stout, whisky?"

"Nothing, thank you," said McNeil. "I have breakfasted."

He was lost in amazement at the exotic tastes of his hostess. Before her was a plate containing a collection of the pink armour-plating of innumerable shrimps, upon whose carcases, reinforced by stout, she had apparently breakfasted. Even as he watched, she tackled the few survivors in the most unself-conscious manner, nipping off their heads and consuming the bodies with gusto. When she had completed her repast, she drank the remaining half-glass of stout and—horror of horrors—wiped her beautiful soft white fingers upon the jade-green and old-gold wrap that enfolded her.

"Now," she said, with a sigh of satisfaction, "you would like to know why I advertised for a man of daring, and why I picked upon you? It is a strange story."

She paused, and her eyes, apparently fixed upon McNeil, gazed through and beyond him into some mysterious land that was closed to him.

"Tell me," he said softly.

There was something about Francesca Marinetti that lifted her above her surroundings. She might eat shrimps, drink stout—do anything crude and material, but one had only to look at her, and all her crudities dropped into insignificance. In appearance and in manner she was a queen amongst women, and McNeil, watching her as she breakfasted, was fascinated in spite of himself.

"It is a strange story," she repeated, as she vandalised the gorgeous garment that she wore by wiping and rewiping her soiled fingers in its folds. "My mother came from Scotland, and my father—ah, what a man he was!—came from Corsica. I, Major McNeil, am a Corsican, to the last drop of my blood—and it is the last of the blood of the Marinettis. That man who forced his way in is my mother's brother. He is a scoundrel. He has always been a scoundrel, and now he is determined to rob me of my inheritance. But you do not understand. How can you when I begin at the wrong end? Let us smoke."

She opened a silver box that lay beside her on the table, and offered it to McNeil. He shook his head at sight of the rose-leaf tips, anticipating—correctly—the nature of the tobacco. Diffidently drawing out an old black briar, he looked inquiringly at his hostess.

"Smoke what you like," she said graciously. "I like to see a man with a pipe, but for me—this."

She blew a cloud of smoke from her lungs, and as the amber-scented fumes reached McNeil's nostrils he blessed the instinct that had prompted his refusal.

"Now let me tell you," went on Francesca Marinetti, her elbow on the table, the hand bent gracefully backward and the long aspiring wisps of smoke twining upward from her white fingers. "My mother came of a Scottish family which for many generations has owned a large estate in Scotland. I have never seen it, for I was born and brought up in my father's country—in the hills of Corsica. My mother had three brothers, the youngest of whom you have seen. All the rest are dead.

"When my grandfather died the estate fell to my mother's eldest brother, my Uncle Robert, and he died nearly three months ago. Mind you, I never saw him, and can but tell you what I have heard. They were a strange family, these Rintouls, savage and selfish and cruel. You have seen my Uncle Rufus, so you can easily guess what they were like. Can ye no'?"

McNeil nodded his assent, rather than interrupt the story, yet in his heart he was still far from being convinced that the man with the red beard was all that his niece painted him to be.

"My Uncle Robert—the Laird they called him—never married, and when he died he

left a will that only a Rintoul could have made. In it he said that he hated all his relations, and that as for his estate, they must fight for it amongst themselves. Now you ken for what I want you. You must help me to fight my Uncle Rufus, for what can a woman do by hersel' against a man like him?"

McNeil looked astonished, as well he might.

"But—I do not understand," he stammered, taking his pipe from his mouth. "How can one fight for an estate in these days, except by going to law?"

"The law doesna come into it. It's all in the will. I have not got it by me, but I have read it so often that I know the conditions by heart. He was a wicked old man, determined to make bad blood amongst all the branches of his family—why, I dinna ken. He left the whole of the estate to whichever branch of the family could take possession and hold the family seat for one whole month."

"But it is preposterous," exclaimed McNeil. "No court of law could uphold such a will."

"Maybe no!" agreed the lady. "But my uncle was cunning as well as wicked. There is a clause which says that any claimant who goes to law is to forfeit all right to benefit under the will, though he added that he felt sure that the dourness and the greed of the Rintouls would be strong enough in themselves to keep them from the clutches of the law."

"But if your uncle has been dead nearly three months, how is it that his brother and you are here in London?" asked McNeil.

"Because the will says that the contest is to commence at dawn on the first day after thirteen weeks have elapsed since the day of my uncle's death. He explained that this was to assure that all the parties interested should have ample notice. I am telling it to you almost word for word as it is written in the will."

"Your uncle must have been a humourist or a madman," declared McNeil. "A more preposterous arrangement was never made on this earth, I feel sure. Is there any one else in the running besides yourself and the gentleman I have just seen?"

"I have a cousin, but we need not think of her," replied Francesca Marinetti, with a wave of the hand that disposed of this candidate's chance contemptuously. "She is the daughter of my Uncle James, but her parents are dead. She is alone in the world; and what can one girl hope to do against Uncle Rufus, or against me?"

McNeil was too shrewd to point out that the speaker herself was but a single girl. He had already seen enough of her moods to guess that it was best to humour her, and that silence was the best safety play.

"Now, Major McNeil," she went on, rising suddenly and standing before him with arms stretched out appealingly, "I have told you my story. Will you be my champion—the chief of my staff?"

McNeil rose and faced her hesitatingly. It was all so vague and obscure to him still.

"But what, exactly, do you want me to do?" he stammered.

"Why do you hesitate and ask questions?" she cried angrily. "Do you not want to serve me—or is it that you dinna ken if I can pay? All that I earn—and I am *the* Corsican contralto—I will spend rather than let that wretch, my uncle, have my rights. I am of the elder branch, and the inheritance should be mine. You shall engage my men and lead them. I will pay you and them well, and when we have won—you shall have whatever you desire as your reward."

As she spoke the last phrase she leant eagerly forward, with parted lips and glowing eyes, and in her face McNeil read more than in her words. To him who fought and won this contest for her, she would be prepared to give much—even her own seductive self. McNeil thrilled at the thought, but whether with pleasure or with fear he could not at the moment have said.

He had not time to think, for Francesca Marinetti leant towards him, eagerly awaiting his reply.

McNeil was fascinated. He could not have refused even had he wished to do so, and he was far from certain that he did so wish. The wonderful beauty of the girl, her wildly impulsive nature, the intriguing character of the story that she had told him, all drew him on like so many magnets.

"I accept the post, Signorina Marinetti," he said. "I will help you in every way in which an honourable man can."

"What more do I ask?" she cried, firing up in her impetuous way. "Is it not honourable to fight for a woman? But I must warn you. You must not kill my uncle. It is against the rules."

"Kill your uncle!" cried McNeil, thunderstruck at the idea. "What makes you think I might do that?"

"It is the obvious thing to do," she replied calmly. "It is the one way by which I can be sure of getting my rights, and my Uncle Robert knew it, therefore he put a clause in his will that any claimant to the estate who murders, either directly or by an agent, another claimant or that claimant's agent, forfeits forthwith his or her interest in the estate. I have read it till I know it by heart, but it canna be got over."

McNeil breathed a sigh of relief. He began to entertain a whole-hearted respect for the deceased.

CHAPTER IV.

Further conversation with his new mistress convinced McNeil of the authenticity of this remarkable will, and he became exceedingly curious to know what steps she proposed to take to forward her claim, and in what manner of service he was to be employed. He hazarded a question on the point.

"We must take the castle by force," replied Francesca, as calmly as though she spoke of taking a taxi. "That is why I need men. You must engage for me enough to take and hold it. I have siller enough, and when we have won, the estate will bring plenty more. You must know of many brave officers who need work. One reads of them every day. Then we go to Scotland, and when dawn breaks on the morning that the contest begins we surround the castle so that my Uncle Rufus cannot enter, and we take possession."

"It sounds feasible," agreed McNeil, pleased to find that she had a reasonable plan of campaign, and one which promised success without melodrama. "Is this castle closed up, or is there some one left in charge?"

"That is another strange thing. My uncle who is dead left his butler to look after the castle and to be his sole executor and referee of the contest. I hear he is a strange old man, and was my uncle's only friend. He is to help no one, hinder no one, and show no bias. That again is the word of the will."

"Wonderful man, your uncle. He thought of everything," said McNeil, lost in a mixture of admiration and amusement.

"He was a wretch, a villain, a scoundrel," retorted Francesca with flashing eyes. "He should have left everything to me. He hated all the rest of the family, but he could not hate me, for he had never seen me."

McNeil found it difficult to pin his impetuous mistress down to practical details, and when an hour later he left her, it was with no fuller instructions than to be discreet, search out a few unemployed ex-officers whom he knew and could trust, and call again next day.

He walked back citywards with his brain in a whirl. At times he was tempted to stop in the busy street and laugh aloud. Then a memory of Signorina Marinetti's wonderful beauty would float before his eyes, and all sense of the absurd would leave him. Here, indeed, was a woman to champion.

On a hoarding he saw her name in great green letters. He stopped to look, and found that she was singing 'Carmen' that evening. On an impulse he went into a neighbouring theatre-ticket agency and secured a stall. He smiled at his own extravagance, but somehow the events of the morning

had given him the feeling of making a start on a new career. At least he was assured of earning a comfortable subsistence for some weeks to come, and perhaps, if he succeeded in besting the man with the red beard—he smiled again at his own fancy, and would not permit himself to carry it to its logical conclusion.

The Honourable Thomas Owen was still in his frowsty bed when McNeil returned, and his room was thick with the acrid smoke of shag. An empty beer bottle and glass on the table by his bedside indicated that he had breakfasted.

He looked shrewdly at McNeil as he entered.

"There's no need to tell me, Neil," he said at once, pointing at his friend with his pipe-stem. "Sound the cymbals, beat the drums, see the conquering hero comes. No longer a needy penny-a-liner, in his opulence he forgot the friends who had supported him in his early struggles, or assisted them but with a grudging charity that was worse than insult. Who is she? Unfold."

McNeil had already determined to tell his friend the whole story in confidence. He had been warned to be discreet, but had not been sworn to secrecy, and he knew that Bubbly could be trusted.

The little man's eyes opened wider and wider as the story went on, and by the time McNeil had finished, his pipe had fallen amongst the bedclothes, scattering ash where it listed, and he was rubbing his hands together with gleeful excitement.

"I've got to be in this, Neil," he cried. "It's too good to miss. You can take it, I accept your offer."

"But how can you, Bubbly, you ass?"

"Gallant ex-officer out o' work—handsome and daring too."

"Rot. I'm not going to start my new job by swindling my boss. It can't be done, Bubbly."

"You've got to get me in somehow," Owen insisted obstinately. "Hang it, man, but for me you wouldn't have the job. Think of that beautiful letter I wrote for you. Think how useful my intellect would be on the strategic side of the business. Brawn you, brains me. It's an ideal combination."

"If only you'd keep sober——"

"I'll even do *that* rather than be left without a part in this comic opera," declared the other earnestly.

McNeil was thinking quickly. He liked Owen, and knew that there was truth in what he said of his brains. If it came to the making of plans he would certainly be the more useful of the two.

"I won't be a party to any false pretences," he said at last. "But I'll tell you what I *will* do, Bubbly. I'll sing your praises so far as my conscience will allow—which isn't very

far, for you are a drunken little reprobate—and I'll ask Signorina Marinetti to let me put you on the staff."

"Then I'm as good as engaged. I must reform myself."

He leapt out of bed, displaying himself in a ragged old-fashioned nightshirt, which, being short, exposed a pair of exceedingly skinny legs.

"A strategist must be clean-shaven, and have his hair cut," he announced seriously. "Leave me to my ablutions."

McNeil spent the afternoon hunting up ex-army acquaintances whom he knew to be none too well off, and in sounding them vaguely as to their willingness to enter upon an adventure that promised excitement and good pay. He found that he would have little difficulty in getting his men.

In the evening, to the astonishment of the Honourable Thomas, he appeared in dress clothes of pre-war cut, and announced that he was going out. This was unprecedented, and Bubbly was openly and vulgarly curious as to his projected movements, but could get no satisfaction.

It was the closing week of an operatic season, during which Francesca Marinetti had made something of a sensation. She had not before appeared in England, and her wonderful voice and temperament, combined with her rare beauty, had brought her immediate fame.

The house was filling rapidly as McNeil took his seat, and he had not long to wait before the curtain rose. He thought he had had a glimpse of every possible mood of Signorina Marinetti earlier in the day, but even that first act was a revelation to him. She was not an actress—she *was* Carmen. He sat fascinated, entranced, as he watched her and listened to the richness, the beauty of her marvellous voice, and when the curtain fell upon the first act he rose to his feet with the rest of the audience and added his quota to the thunder of applause that followed.

In the reaction that follows upon a crisis of emotion or excitement there comes a craving for the concrete, the material, and McNeil hurried out with a stream of others to smoke a cigarette. As he strolled solitary through the throng in the promenade, he felt a hand pressed upon his shoulder, and, turning, found himself face to face with the man with the red beard.

In evening dress, with his height and splendid build, his finely-poised head and flaming hair, he was a man who could not fail to attract attention. As they faced one another, he and McNeil, their eyes were on a level, and there was little to choose between them in breadth, though the elder man seemed a shade the more strongly built. He looked at McNeil with a slight smile in which there was nothing inimical but rather ingratiating.

"Good-evening, sir," he said, with a courteous inclination of his flaming head. "It is no mere coincidence that we should meet here, for we have both come on the same errand."

McNeil returned his salutation.

"And that is?" he replied non-committally.

"Vulgar curiosity," said the other with candour. "Like myself, I should guess you came not for the music, but for the sight of Francesca. I will say she does the family credit. Man, what a pity it is that a man may not marry his niece. It would be a grand way of settling our differences, and I'm open to admit that the prospect would be pleasing forbye."

"For you, no doubt," retorted McNeil, firing up in defence of his employer. "From what I saw this morning the lady might take a somewhat different view."

"Ay, at first. But every woman is open to persuasion. However, there's little gained by discussing impossibilities. You'll have no rival in me, Major McNeil."

"Nor is anything gained by personalities, Mr Rintoul," said McNeil hotly.

"I stand corrected," said the other. "I have no wish to quarrel with you—at present. In fact, a little friendly chat between us might be greatly to the advantage of both."

McNeil hesitated. Cold reason told him that he should have no dealings with this enemy of his mistress, that she would certainly disapprove even of the few words he had already spoken, yet he had an impulse to allow the conversation to go further. He told himself that no harm could come of it so long as he was discreet, and that he might learn something through the indiscretion of the other. In reality, there was a certain fascination about the personality of Rufus Rintoul, and McNeil wanted to see more of him.

"What could we have to chat about? After all, we are strangers," he hazarded.

"We have at least one mutual interest—my niece."

"A subject I cannot discuss with you," retorted McNeil.

"Then I'll suggest another," said Rintoul with a twinkle in his green eyes. "Will you discuss a whisky-and-soda with me after the play?"

The bell rang for the second act. McNeil could hesitate no longer.

"A non-controversial subject," he said with a smile. "I accept with pleasure."

"Then I'll meet you in the entrance-hall at the close."

They parted, and McNeil reached his seat as the lights went down, and for the remainder of the opera lost himself in the ecstasy of following Carmen to her tragic end. Never had he heard such singing or seen such a perfection of interpretation. It was with a sigh, almost of relief, that

he sank back to his seat after the enthusiasm at the fall of the last curtain.

In the entrance-hall he found Rufus Rintoul awaiting him, a handsome figure in opera hat, and coat that fitted his fine shoulders and slim waist to perfection.

"I've got a taxi," he said as McNeil reached him. "I didn't wait for the finish. I've no ear for music, and tragedy makes me laugh. Still, the lass is a credit to the family, indubitably. You'll come round to my flat?"

For a moment McNeil hesitated. Was it wise? Then he nodded his assent. Surely he was man enough to look after himself. The momentary hesitation was not lost upon Rintoul.

"You'll be quite safe," he said with a smile. "There's no means of disposing of a body in Jermyn Street."

McNeil smiled in reply.

"I flatter myself that I could afford the risk even if there were," he said.

A few minutes in the taxi brought them to their destination. Rintoul showed his guest into a comfortable room—a man's room, cigar-scented, and furnished with heavily-upholstered chairs, a desk, many book-shelves, and a tantalus. He produced glasses and a siphon, and drew two chairs to the fire.

"Now we can have a crack," he said, when they were stretched out, cigars alight, and glasses within reach.

McNeil smoked in silence and expectancy. He was here to learn what he could, not to talk, he kept reminding himself.

Rintoul glanced at him shrewdly, and surmised his attitude. He smiled to himself, and, coming to a decision, leant forward in his chair suddenly.

"So you answered the advertisement," he said abruptly, his green eyes intent on his guest's face.

It would have taken a cleverer man than McNeil to hide all trace of an understanding of the question. He certainly recovered himself quickly, and turned a blank face on the questioner, but it was too late.

Rintoul laughed aloud.

"You needna answer, Major McNeil," he said with a certain exultation. "You've given me all the answer I need. It *was* hers, then! I guessed there could not be two such mad women in London. So you answered it, you struck her fancy, and you got the job, eh?—Oh, I'm asking you nothing—I'm *telling* you."

"I really don't know what you are talking about, Mr Rintoul," protested McNeil, greatly chagrined now that he saw how he had been trapped. "I am quite out of my depth."

He knew that the denial was useless, that his host would not believe him, yet he had to say it. Rintoul ignored his protest.

"That point being cleared

up," he said, "there comes the question of what you are going to do. 'Lead a desperate enterprise,' the advertisement said. That looks like engaging a gang, I fancy; but of course you won't confirm it. I hardly expect you to. Well, gang or no gang, Major McNeil, I'm ready for you. I wonder did she tell you about the will, or if you're working in the dark."

He looked at his victim inquiringly, but McNeil smoked silently, and gazed into the glow of the fire. He was determined that his face should give no more away. Internally he was cursing his folly in coming to the flat.

Rufus Rintoul grinned. He was enjoying himself hugely. As he got no answer he continued his monologue.

"To dissipate all doubt, I'll tell you myself," he said.

He took a long draught from his glass, and then told the story of his brother Robert's will substantially as McNeil had heard it earlier in the day, but from a different point of view and in very different language.

"So, you see, it's a fight to the finish, if not to the death," he concluded. "The Rintouls as a family never could agree, but Bob made a hobby o' family squabbles. I mind even as a boy, though he was twenty years older than me, the way he used to bully me. I suppose he was determined to keep up the Rintoul tradition even when he was dead and buried, and took this means of insuring it. Wherever he is, he'll be chuckling at the success of his plan to-night."

He paused and awaited comment.

"An exceedingly interesting story," said McNeil.

"And you'll be wondering why I told it to you?" asked Rintoul, watching him closely.

McNeil made no reply.

"Well, I'll tell you. I've nothing to hide. There's the will, and here's me—the man who means to get the estate, by any means. There's no question of fair or foul, because there's no rules except the one—murder disqualifies. . . . It's a pity"—he paused, and sighed almost like a man disappointed in love—"because it makes the affair more complicated. I don't know what Bob can have been thinking o', to make him so squeamish at the last. However, one must just accept the inevitable. Now, Major McNeil, you're a sensible man, a Scotsman like myself. You must see plainly that a slip of a girl like my niece has no chance against a man like me. Yet I'm not a hard man, nor a mean man, and above all things I want to avoid trouble. Therefore I'm prepared to pay her out. In return for her relinquishing all claim to the estate, I'm prepared to settle on her a sum sufficient to bring her in five hundred a year for life. What do you think of that?"

"I have no opinion to express, Mr Rintoul. The matter

does not concern me," said McNeil cautiously.

"Hm. Yes, I see your point. You would lose your chance of the 'rich reward' mentioned in the advertisement. Well, it's a reasonable position, and I'm quite prepared to meet you. The rich reward will be yours when my niece agrees to my terms."

McNeil rose from his seat.

"You insult me, sir," he exclaimed indignantly, and would have said more, but his fear of committing himself or his mistress restrained him.

"It would be no insult if you were not already in the service of my niece," retorted Roger Rintoul. "So you canna very well take offence without making an admission."

He threw back his head and laughed heartily at the expression on McNeil's face.

"Man, you're no match for me," he said with an air of patronage. "You'd best go back to your mistress, give her my message, and retire gracefully from the contest."

McNeil felt the sting of the words, for their truth came home to him. Bitterly did he regret that he had given this man of cunning the opportunity to discover so much about the existing relations between Francesca Marinetti and himself. The fact that he had admitted nothing gave him no satisfaction. The man *knew*, and it was through his folly that the knowledge had escaped.

"It is time that I went home, Mr Rintoul," he said, ignoring the taunt, and keeping his temper with difficulty. "I thank you for your hospitality."

"I'm extraordinarily pleased to have met you, Major McNeil," said Rintoul, his eyes twinkling with pleasure at the other's discomfiture. "Providence must have thrown us together to-night, I'm thinking. Nothing could have been more fortunate—from my point of view. Well, we're sure to meet again. You'll be leading your band of heroes on your desperate enterprise, and desperate I'm telling you you'll find it if you get interfering with me. Good-night to you."

McNeil listened in silence, repeated his "good-night," and turned to go. Neither man offered to shake hands. Rufus Rintoul showed his guest out, and, returning, threw himself down in his chair and laughed, with the laughter of a man well satisfied with himself.

McNeil plodded gloomily through the empty streets.

(To be continued.)

SORTES VIRGILIANÆ.

It is a stale saying that truth is stranger than fiction, and a misleading one; because the strangest truths, as any journalist can testify, must often masquerade as fiction, in order to enjoy their lawful opportunity of exciting universal astonishment. Truth, declares Rudyard Kipling, is a naked lady who must be given a print petticoat before she appears in public. He said it apropos of a certain sea-serpent; but a sea-serpent is, after all, nothing but a zoological anachronism. There are stranger things. Nevertheless, I wish that it had fallen to the lot of Rudyard Kipling to narrate the curious events that I am about to recount, with meticulous accuracy indeed, but without, I fear, any of the dramatic instinct of a master of fiction.

It was on the 13th of December 1921, the eve of the first meeting of the Dail Eireann to decide whether it would or would not approve the Treaty signed in London some eight days previously by Mr Lloyd George and his colleagues and the Irish Plenipotentiaries. I had dined at the club, and was getting into my coat and hat, when Hambur came out of the card-room. We exchanged hellos, and he asked me if I was going anywhere in particular, and I told him, "No, only home," which, where a grass-bachelor in lodgings is concerned, *is* nowhere in particular. "Then come along round to Flannery's," he said. "We're going to consult the Sortes Virgilianæ. There's going to be an archbishop there, and it may be amusing." I said I would go along. It is the principal business in life of a good journalist to go along. On the way Hambur, who is, I should mention, one of the foremost classical scholars of his day, explained to me what the Sortes Virgilianæ are. I gathered that many hundred years ago, when men put more faith in signs and omens and prophecies than they do now, the practice sprang up of inquiring into the future by the comparatively simple process of taking a key—any sort of key would do apparently—and thrusting it at random into a copy of 'Virgil.' A question had previously been put, and the text would then be read, beginning at the line on which the nose of the key rested. Naturally the business, as it became popular, attached unto itself a certain amount of solemn ritual. I cannot say what it is, and for all I know Hambur is the only man alive who knows exactly what it is. But I will make an affidavit that on this occasion all the formalities were duly observed. When we reached Flannery's the rest of the company were

already assembled. Everybody in Dublin, and most people in Ireland, know Flannery. He is the last surviving specimen of a type of Irishmen that has long been on the verge of extinction. Gifted with a mordant wit, an enormous agility of mind, a physical constitution that enabled them to excel and to exceed where others would have abandoned the chase from sheer exhaustion; steeped in an hereditary taste for literature, and classics in particular, they were nevertheless unable often enough to give to the world what they gave to their friends. A lack of singleness of purpose, an inconsequent curiosity, drove them hither and thither, with the result that while less-gifted beings were presenting posterity with the sound fruits of industrious scholarship, they were content to delight their intimates with what Kai Lung would call an unobtrusive display of versatile dexterity. Far be it from me to allot to a man like Flannery, who helps to make life interesting for the aristocracy of the living, a lower place than that of the scholar who plants intellectual pleasure-gardens for the feet of the thankless unborn, who show a steadily-increasing preference for playing in the muck.

When we reached Flannery's the company, as I have said, was already congregated in his comfortable library. The archbishop was there, also a clever journalist over from London to write up the Dail Eireann meeting, and perhaps half a dozen other men, all of them distinguished in greater or lesser degree for their intellectual attainments. I suppose that with the exception of myself there was no one present who could not claim to be a sound classical scholar. Even the London journalist—*mirabile dictu*—had managed to preserve a charming atmosphere of cap-and-gown through all the tempests of pseudo-American modernism that rave about Carmelite House.

Coffee and whisky-and-soda having been dispensed, and cigars and pipes lighted, we got to the business of the Sortes Virgilianæ. It was a familiar thing to all present but myself. I do not mean to say that the distinguished Roman prelate who was present consults omens habitually. But all had heard of them, their popularity lasting through centuries, and their astonishing accuracy. Some one present recalled how they had foretold the decapitation of King Charles I. to that unadaptable monarch. Other instances were recalled, and by the time the scene was set I was not the only one present in whom the feeling of idle curiosity had given way to a more disturbing emotion. For the first question which it had been decided to ask was no trivial one, but concerned a matter which, with the exception of the two journalists, was nearest at that

moment to the hearts of all present. The question was, "What is going to happen to Arthur Griffith?" A handsomely-bound edition of the *opera* of P. Virgilius Maro was produced, the dust upon which was a sufficient proof that we were not to be the victims of a hoax by the nimble-witted Flannery, and a key of the right dimensions was found. And since it is decreed that the inserting of the key into the book must be done by some "chaste person," a child, an unmarried girl, or a priest, this task fell upon one of the two clerics present, the chaplain of a famous educational establishment. With becoming gravity His Reverence pressed the key in between the leaves of the book, and, holding it tightly, passed it to Hambur, to whom, as the most distinguished scholar present, the task of reading the answer to the question had been allotted.

"What will happen to Arthur Griffith?" I saw Hambur open the book carefully, and with his thumb on the key to keep it in place, hold the page up to his eyes in the myopic way that he has. He seemed a long time beginning, and it flashed across my mind that though his face remained impassive, his mind was strangely moved. And such is the peculiar quality of thought that before he had begun to read a word all knew that the Sortes had answered our question in no offhand or nebulous fashion. Even as this thought flashed across me I heard Hambur reading in his slow even voice—

". . . spretæ Ciconum quo munere matres
Inter sacra deum nocturnique orgia Bacchi,
Discerptum latos juvenem sparsere per agros."

"What will become of Arthur Griffith?" "Spretæ quo munere — spurned by which gifts — repudiated by the Treaty; matres Ciconum—the Mænads——" At the word "Mænads" the archbishop literally "sat up." For that is the name by which the Black Women are known among the more moderate brethren of Sinn Fein. "Matres Ciconum, the Mænads," continued Hambur in the same monotonous voice, "inter sacra deum—amid the rights of the Gods—in the midst of the celebrations; nocturnique orgia Bacchi — and amid the orgies of night-loving Bacchus—in a frenzy of black Republicanism; discerptum latos juvenem sparsere per agros—will tear the young man to pieces and scatter them over the wide fields." Hambur closed the book and laid it on the table. For a moment nobody spoke. Then a long way off—perhaps half a mile away—I heard some one telling some one else that it was really remarkable. And then we all began to demand at once that a second question should be asked. I think my own motive was curiosity, and yet not curiosity, because I felt curiously certain that the

next question would be answered not less clearly. But I believe that some at least of the company hoped and believed that the next answer would be a blank. They wanted an anti-climax. It was all a piece of foolishness, of course, saved from being merely vulgar, like table-rapping or planchette, by the injection of a leaven of scholarship. Had there not been a feeling of this kind I think the next question would have dealt with some matter remote from politics. As it was, the political situation seemed to draw them like a magnet. And the question decided upon was, "What will De Valera do?"

Again the book was opened, and again the chaplain inserted the key. And once more Hambur, his nose pressed against the open page, read the answer. "What will De Valera do?"

"Quære age et armari pubem portisque moveri
Lætus in arma jube et Phrygios, qui flumine pulchro
Consedere, duces pictosque exure carinas.
Cœlestum vis magna jubet."

"Rouse thee now, and with joyful heart bid thy young men arm themselves and move to the fray and destroy the leaders of the foreign oppressors who have settled on our beautiful river, and burn their painted ships. The might of Heaven orders this to be done."

And even as Hambur continued reading there flashed to my mind a sinister remark made by this same De Valera to one of the Southern Unionists in the days when he was still bandying words over Mr Lloyd George's initial offer of peace. "If the fighting starts again," he is reported to have said, "the Southern Unionists will not be treated as neutrals. And many unpleasant things will happen."

And now, with De Valera's challenge to the Treaty already thrown down, and the possibility of his overthrowing the Free State, either in Dail Eireann or in spite of it, looming like a dark cloud on the horizon of Irish peace, not I alone but all present were thinking of the unpleasant things that might happen—if the Sortes told sooth. I am, as I have said, no scholar, but as a schoolboy I often laboured long and woundily at the Ænead after my more prehensile fellows had gone forth to play. And now the story of that weak and egotistical young man, Turnus the Rutilian—another De Valera if ever there was one—came back to me: how Juno, ever harassing the Trojans, even as some malign fate seems to sow perpetual discord among the Irish peoples, sent Alecto disguised as Madame Markiewicz, or rather as Calybe the priestess, to urge Turnus to attack the Trojans. What the others were thinking about I do not know, for Flannery, with the unerring instinct of a good host, was already urging us to replenish our glasses, and setting the frozen stream of conversation to flowing again. And so we continued to talk, mostly about Ireland and what

the morrow's meeting would bring forth, until it was time to go home. But nobody suggested that a third attempt should be made to consult the oracle. For my own part, I have no faith in such trifles. It is mere curiosity that keeps me wondering if the things foretold by the Sortes Virgilianæ will come to pass. And if at the moment I incline to believe that they will, it is for reasons totally unconnected with the subject-matter of this story.

CASTLE JANE.

THERE'S a poem of a mansion built, without regard to scansion,
By a man who made free verse in bricks and stone;
On a hillside it is sitting in a metre wholly fitting,
As the critic is admitting, but—its own.
Its walls are high and cracked and hung with ivy,
The stable buildings boast a battered vane;
There are chickens on the cobbles, where the pensioned pony hobbles,
And the name by which it goes is Castle Jane.

With a tug to set it swinging, there's a bell that makes a ringing
Till it's summoned wide-eyed Molly to the mat;
But her breathless invitation needn't cause you trepidation,
It is simply that she's trodden on the cat,
Which has a trick of sleeping near the hat-stand,
And bitterly resents a heavy toe:
Then the welcome and the dragging of the dog, who, with tail wagging,
Is assuring you he's loath to let you go.

You must know—it is your duty—that a famous county beauty
Used to tread the shallow stairs that face you there.
She'd a skin of cream and roses, and the daintiest of noses,
And the purple of the night was in her hair.
It is ninety years ago, or maybe longer,
Since O'Grady fought MacDermot for the right
To escort her into dinner. And O'Grady was the winner
When he shot his rival's whiskers out of sight.

There are ghosts—a poor house is it, and unworthy of a visit,
That is innocent of one in County Cork,—
The old lady by the fire, in Victorian attire,
With her basket and her piece of needle-work,
The little girl, who sobs upon the landing,
The rope that creaks inside the haunted room,
And the imp, who's heard a-calling down the drive when dusk is falling,
And who giggles as he gambols in the gloom.

Castle Jane can hardly gather out of all the roar and blather
Of her country's politicians what's to do.
There've been strangers in the village who compelled the boys to pillage,
There've been murders and a cattle-drive or two.
The glories, as she knew them, have departed,
The old régime has tottered to a close;
And, with rows of windows blinking as the winter sun is sinking,
She's preparing for a comfortable doze.

THE PEREGRINATIONS OF AN OFFICER'S WIFE.

IV.

A SHORT time ago I was again in Brussels. At a large official luncheon-party I met a certain distinguished Belgian Minister. We talked of Germany, and I told him I had spent ten of the happiest months of my married life with the British Army of Occupation at Bonn. He turned on me in horror. "Bonn," he cried—"vile place, vile people." I felt uncomfortable. I had obviously said the wrong thing, committed a gaffe. He too had spent ten months or so in Bonn, in solitary confinement, imprisoned by the Germans for some imaginary political offence. He had been sent to Bonn. He had not lived in a lovely villa on the banks of the Rhine. His dwelling was a dirty prison. I had often seen the outside of it. He did not motor or ride all over the lovely surrounding country. His exercise consisted in walking round a tiny yard for an hour a day, afterwards returning to his little cell, where four times a month he was allowed to receive or write a letter. We looked at Bonn and its inhabitants from such totally different points of view, and I found later that our views on the Irish question were equally far apart. A friend of mine had had a terrible experience in Ireland, and as I did not care to talk of my own experiences, I spoke of hers. She was the sole survivor of a motoring party. I did not know his views, and I mentioned this tragedy feeling sure of his sympathy. But this Minister, to my astonishment, said it was very sad for individuals, of course, but if Ireland could not get what she wanted any other way, then the way she had taken—the way of murder—was right. Then he added, that doubtless these particular murders to which I had alluded—one victim was a woman—had been reprisals for some act committed by the British soldiers. The British soldiers who had saved Belgium, whose comrades lie there in their thousands in the soil they gave their lives for! This time it was my turn to be horrified. I thought of Ypres. I thought of a hundred things. Then I thought that perhaps the poor man did not understand English, did not know what he had said. My French is none too good for arguing. Besides, I dared not argue about Ireland, and, above all, with a Belgian who condoned the murder of British soldiers. I feel it all too much, and get so heated. It was such a hot day, and the champagne so sweet and sticky. I was hot enough already, so I turned away and talked of horses to

an officer on my other side, of a horse I had ridden in Brussels, and which he was taking over to jump at Olympia.

But I am very fond of Belgium and of the Belgians. I even try and stand up for the refugees, by whom I find most people still judge all Belgians. I felt distinctly hurt that a Belgian Minister could make such a remark to me. So much for gratitude, I thought. Flanders has ever been the cockpit of Europe, and will doubtless be the same again. At the moment I almost found myself hoping it would be. Ireland will be a republic when that day comes, —and it surely will come,—an independent state. What help will Ireland give to Belgium in the next war should that country need help as sorely as she needed it in the last?

I wish I could publish just a few of the letters I received from Irish men and women after the publication of my article on Ireland. Not out of the whole lot were there apparently two of my correspondents who thought alike on any subject. For instance, to mention only one small item on the list, I had at least six explanations of the words Sinn Fein sent to me. I received innumerable stories of the cruelties practised by various regiments on the poor miserable Irish peasants. Perhaps my Belgian friend had also heard and believed these stories. But perhaps they had omitted to tell him what I knew, that the soldiers had probably seen and suffered much before committing the alleged cruelties which, without doubt, had been shamefully exaggerated. I did not feel moved to tears of shame, as one of my correspondents trusted I would be. I was certainly moved almost to tears by one or two of those letters, but I fear they were tears of laughter and not of shame, the spelling was so quaint. But the funniest thing I saw was a copy of 'Blackwood's Magazine' which contained my article, in a hotel in London, with innumerable paragraphs underlined, and innumerable interjections added, many of them the reverse of complimentary.

In Ireland I touched horror, saw tragedy incarnate, and no one — no woman anyway— could take a part in such a tragedy and ever look on life with the same eyes again. For the first time in my life I met sudden death face to face in its most violent form, and so I have another memory which will be with me to my dying day. A merciful providence draws a veil of forgetfulness over the past—a veil which softens and dims even memories of murder, I suppose. But from time to time a corner of that veil is lifted by some chance word or incident, and I know that I can never forget. "Has something befallen thee? It is well. Everything that falls was from the beginning destined and spun for thee as thy share out of the world. . . .

"Ah, unlucky I am that this

has befallen me! Nay, but rather lucky am I, that though this has befallen me, yet am I still unhurt, neither crushed by the present nor dreading the future."

V.

When the war broke out I was living peacefully in the country, and my husband was in camp; he came back to collect his kit and departed, I knew not where.

Like a whirlwind the local Remount man swept down upon me, full of zeal to serve his country—England. Just those first few days I felt I had already given enough for my country. We had just bought a horse cheap; so nervous it was almost impossible to mount him. I told the Remount officer this, but he instantly thought I was inventing a little tale to try to keep the horse, and appealed to my better feelings, my patriotism. Both were somewhat lacking at the moment, so I said rather shortly, "Take the horse, and I hope he will kick you." He did, and in two days the horse was back in the stable; he had kicked several people apparently. What centuries seem to have passed since that day in August, when I still looked forward to hunting that winter and wrangled with the Remount officer about horses; when I was very injured because I had to give up two horses out of three. I thought of those horses when I went round the battlefields in January 1919. How long had mine lasted, I wondered? How true it was that "they also died for England."

Gradually everything went, and very, very slowly the knowledge came to me what it meant to be a soldier's wife. Later it came to most women.

I suppose they will always have a small regular army in England, just large enough to tide over the first few months of every war. While it is being exterminated, other armies will be formed. Just as the little regular army bears the first shock of war, so do their women-folk bear their share at home while the other women are getting ready.

At last I could live where I liked, go where I liked, and how gladly I would have returned to the regiment and to the life and the people who had now suddenly become so much to me. With children and a house, and a husband who quite often came home wounded, it was impossible for me to do any regular work. I seldom rose beyond the rank of charwoman. Once when my husband was a Brigadier I too rose to giddy heights. I became a "sink worm." This is a creature which bends all day over a sink, and I liked it better than scrubbing floors and men's lockers, and looked

upon it as a promotion. Once for a very short time I was a pantry-maid, or something of that sort, in a large London hospital. I started off by the workman's train, and served the breakfast of some thirty unwashed, unshaven officers. At midday I went down and helped the cook. The kitchen is a good spot, in the winter anyway, and I was fed and made much of, which was very soothing when I was hungry and tired. There were no "ladies" in the kitchen, which was a relief. I liked working in the men's hospitals best. I had always loved them. My feeling was not a mushroom growth of the war, a sudden love as quick to go as it had been quick to come. I only worked in the hospitals where the soldiers were convalescent, and nearly all fit and ready to help themselves. Sometimes when no one was looking they helped me. They were the spoiled darlings, I—the unfortunate char. Once I upset a bottle of ink on a man's bed. Positively trembling, I awaited the arrival of the sister. But when she arrived the man explained at once how he had upset the ink. Sister beamed at him. I dread to think what she would have said had she suspected me of the crime. The regular sisters had not much use for the local helps, of which I was frequently one. The habits I learned in the war are ineradicable. The other day my husband was wounded in Ireland. How nicely I behaved when I went to see him in the military hospital. I sprang to my feet when sister came into his room. When matron arrived, and was talking to the patient, I started mechanically dusting the table with my handkerchief, and breathing on the door handle, which was of brass, I gave it an extra polish with my skirt. Doctors during the war had become to me beings from another sphere. With a duster and a dustpan I went in front of them on bended knees. Even if I had done the stairs but an hour before, I did them again when word came that the doctor was coming round. From some small experience of men, I feel sure that they would have been the last to detect the small speck of dust perchance left over from my previous round.

At other times I worked at home. As the war went on I gradually moved down-hill. Each house I took was smaller than the last, but the difficulties became larger. The dust-bin in the country had never interested me much before. I suppose the gardener emptied it. I never inquired. But when he left it became an insuperable problem. The question arose daily, "what to do with our dust-bin?" I thought of starting a correspondence in the 'Daily Mail'; I am sure I should have got some useful hints from "British Citizen," or "K.C.," or "Anxious Parent." None of the cottagers near kept pigs or wanted my

rubbish did I hawk it round ever so assiduously. The only person who took any interest in it was a retired Colonel of His Majesty's Guards, my nearest neighbour. His men could not, or would not, come, so I found him with his pig-tub in my backyard sorting out the dust-bin amicably with my cook, and discussing what was or what was not good for pigs. I bought a small destructor, and with the help of the cook, likewise a regular soldier's wife, and so, like the ex-guardsman and myself, quite indifferent to what she did, I endeavoured to burn the rubbish. Eyelashes, eyebrows, one side of my hair, all burned well, but the refuse remained with us in an ever-increasing damp heap. Wearily I turned my attention to the garden. I had always imagined I liked gardening. I don't; I loathe it. Especially do I loathe manure. Dead roses and violas I can deal with, but sterner work awaited me here. I read my gardening books. Manure was evidently needed, and in large quantities. I ordered two cart-loads from the nearest camp. It arrived when I was out, and when I got back I found it sitting not far from my front door. Has any amateur lady gardener ever tried to dig manure into a heavy clay soil? It lay lightly on the top, and that awful heap grew no smaller. Manure and oyster-shells which would not burn in that hateful destructor lay all over my garden, and for all I know they lie there now.

There were times when my husband came on leave, when a different being emerged from her overall with nicely-waved hair and manicured nails, and irreproachably clad I went to meet him. I was dismissed from one hospital with ignominy because of this tiresome habit of meeting my husband. I was scrubbing the floor in preparation for the doctor's visit; it was some Inspector-General or other God-like creature who was expected. A telephone message came; my General was arriving in London that afternoon unexpectedly. I was two miles from my home and two miles from London, but I did it, and met him. Bucket, brushes, and soap were left in the middle of the ward, and I fled, never to return. Perhaps the Inspector-General fell over the bucket; I knew not, neither did I care. Panting I arrived at the office of my friend the R.T.O. at Victoria Station. There are two men I came across during the war who deserve a chapter to themselves—the two R.T.O.'s at Victoria. There may have been more, but I only remember two, and cannot remember their names. I can only remember their unfailing helpfulness and sympathy. They liked being telephoned to and asked inane questions about trains; they said it was what they were there for. They actually suggested I should ring up again. I gasped and dropped the receiver in my astonishment. No one had ever spoken to

me like that before; I was not dismissed as that tiresome and unnecessary thing—an officer's wife! I was encouraged to "ring again." Perhaps any one's heart would have softened had they spent much time at Victoria Station during the war. Even the incoming leave-trains had their pathos. Folkestone Harbour was worse. I only went there once. It was a typical seaside day. The wind blew in great gusts; rain fell at intervals in a drenching downpour. The tears, always kept back till the parting was over, had filled my eyes; I could neither see or speak, when I felt a hand on my arm and a voice say: "If you stand here you will see him again as he goes round that corner." I looked up; it was a policeman. The same voice went on: "I never knew I had a heart till I took on this job." Perhaps I had not known I had one either till I took on the job of an officer's wife in war-time. Back to London, eyes averted as the taxi passed the hotel which I had left such a short time before. Back to the very empty house, the garden, the manure-heap—which had grown no smaller in my absence—and the other horrors. The pretty clothes were put away, and with a sigh I donned my overall once more and waited. And all day and all night I heard the guns in France.

The first time I saw anything of the actual effects of the war on women, other than my own friends, was at a certain northern seaport town, where vice and drink were rampant, and where for a few weeks my husband commanded a reserve battalion which supplied the regiment at the front with drafts. They were all old soldiers, mad keen to get out to France, and somewhat hard to restrain while waiting their turn. However, by dint of selecting the drafts, and locking them up for twenty-four hours previous to their departure,—their friends were so many and so generous,—they were got off moderately sober. We all went to the station to see them off, and I used to take them little presents. In the beginning we did not realise what they were going to, and if they had realised it would have made no difference to them—the pick of England's fighting-men.

Many were the pathetic as well as the funny sights I saw. I used to watch the other women, and sadly wondered how soon my turn would come. It was always easier for those left behind to see the pathetic rather than the funny side of things in the war. I wondered when it came to be my husband's turn to go, whether I should be as brave as some of these women. One in particular I watched one night, she was so splendid, smiling so cheerily till the train had gone. I took her home sobbing on my shoulder. Truly "the Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady were sisters under their skins" in those

days. Some weeks afterwards I saw that Private Smith, as we will call him, had been severely wounded. Getting his home address from the depot, I wrote to Mrs Smith reminding her of her pluck the night I had taken her home. I told her I knew she would show the same brave spirit now. To my dismay a furious letter came back. Mrs Smith had never been to that seaport town to say good-bye to Private Smith, and Mrs Smith would like to know who the hussy was who was seeing Mrs Smith's husband off to the front. I wondered what sort of explanation the poor man gave when he did get home, and what sort of a welcome he received. From Mrs Smith's letter I gathered it would not be a pleasant one.

Sadly disillusioned, I interfered no more.

VI.

Throughout all my wanderings it has ever been the Generals and soldier-servants I have met that have made the most lasting impression on me. Those between are often forgotten. The highest and the lowest alone remain in my mind; and many memories crowd my brain, from grave to gay, from ludicrous to pathetic—a jumble of figures. It always seems to me that Generals and soldier-servants are the most typical figures of the British Army, types that Great Britain alone can produce. No other country, no other Army, has anything quite like them, or ever will have. Of course, one has to be out of the Army to really appreciate Generals. My appreciation of them now is slightly tinged with awe — Generals above the rank of Brigadier, I mean. My husband having once attained that rank, that sort no longer strikes terror in my heart. Besides, they are not Brigadier-Generals, only Colonels-Commandant, and who could be in awe of any one called a Colonel-Commandant! While actually in the Army it is impossible for me to know Generals really well. They produce in me the same slight sinking feeling as the War Office and the dentist. But when I am enjoying a short period of civil life, I find, to my surprise, that they are very much like other men. There is one General, though, of whom I am not frightened, even when I am in the Army. He is such a great man that in his presence one forgets to think of one's self; and it is only the really great who produce that effect of total forgetfulness of self—on me, at any rate. His friends will recognise this General from a description of him given to me by a Royal Prince, who described him as "a very perfect gentleman." There are many others, too, in the British Army to whom

these words would equally apply — soldier-servants as well as Generals.

When I married, my husband's soldier-servant was, as I have already said, one named Henshaw, or, more familiarly, the Ogre. We were drawn together by our mutual love of a fair lady named Boger, a bulldog, who some might call ugly, but was very fair to us. Never have I seen anything like the love of our men for their dogs, or in this case for their master's dog. We also had in Malta a soldier-groom named Eames. A collier in private life, he had the best manners of any man I have ever met. After the war he decided not to return to the pits; and he became an attendant in a lunatic asylum, where, I am sure, he is as nice to the lunatics as he was to us. With perhaps two exceptions, all the many soldiers who have worked for us have been the same— "very perfect gentlemen." One exception I will call Private Bevis, who did a little, a very little work, in our house when we were in the North. He professed to be a rabid teetotaller, which, to my mind, is nearly fatal. I much prefer one slightly addicted to drink. This gentleman came to me one night just before dinner, when I had a few people dining, and confided to me that it would be against his principles to pour out the wine. Especially did he feel that he could not pour it out for our commanding officer, with whom he had a bitter feud. In fact, he said he thought it possible, even likely, that he would pour it down that officer's neck. I persuaded him to go against his principles just for that one night, but I had an anxious evening. About half-way through dinner Bevis disappeared, and did not return. I imagined him overcome by his principles, but learned next day that it was merely a little trouble with the cook and his collar-stud. A few weeks later, after throwing a knife at the cook and stealing a sovereign from the nurse, he disappeared finally. He was never caught. I wonder if he was one of those who, as a deserter, claimed the King's pardon at the beginning of the war. If he did, doubtless he came back and sat tight in a comfortable job in England. Throwing knives at cooks was probably more in his line than bayoneting Germans.

During the war, when my husband was in England for a time, we had a treasure, perhaps the best of a many, named Holt. He was really our groom, but men were getting scarce; we were only allowed one servant, and he gradually inserted himself into the house. The camp was cold and muddy, the kitchen at our billet warm, and the cook, like her mistress, had a soft spot in her heart for all soldiers. His only qualification for the post of groom was the fact that he had once been a carter at a mill. I asked him if he had ever put a side-saddle on a horse. He said "no," but

that he would very soon learn, and anyhow, no one was going to do it but him. I omitted to ask him if he could ride, and our first ride together was fraught with considerable amusement for me and discomfort for Holt. He rode well in front of me and not behind, which seemed unusual. His progress resembled that of John Gilpin, and he finally disappeared at a gallop, clasping his horse firmly round the neck. Some miles farther on I caught him up. "Holt," I said severely, "have you ever been on a horse before?" He admitted cheerfully that he never had, but he thought he would get on all right now; he thought he had got the hang of it, so to speak. Later on he went out to the Dardanelles with my husband, and was wounded the same day. All day long and all night on that crowded hospital ship, he attended to those worse wounded than himself. The same indomitable spirit that had taken him out riding kept him going then. Again in France it was the same story, the story of so many thousands of our soldiers. Holt writes to me now and then from the dirty little Lancashire town in which he lives, a residence that he would not change, I know—for I have tried to move him—for the fairest country in England. He always ends his letter with these words: "The happiest time of my life was when I was with you and the Colonel; with grateful respects; yours Holt."

We had another soldier-servant for a short time during the war, a very, very old soldier. He looked at least eighty, and I could almost believe that he had grounds for his complaint that he had missed both the Crimea and this war. He said—and I think believed—that he had arrived in the Crimea with the very last draft, just a week too late; and now the doctors would not pass him as fit for active service. He doddered happily round among my husband's boots for some weeks until, to his rage and fury, he was declared too old even for that. Yet another type was a groom who was with my husband for a long time in France. B. was the son of a horse-dealer, and had those candid blue eyes without which it is impossible to be a really successful horse-coper. I have them myself, so I know; but, alas! I have also bought horses as well as sold them, and a knowledge of horses as well as an honest face is unluckily essential for the former. Otherwise it becomes expensive. But to return to B. My husband had expressed a desire for a dog. A nice-looking fox-terrier was almost immediately forthcoming, which B. had "found," he explained, not far from some gunner lines in the Salient. Early next day an irate gunner Major arrived, and abruptly claimed the dog. B., with those honest blue eyes firmly fixed on the Major's face, gave him for twenty minutes without a pause the whole history of the dog for

the past three generations—bred by B.'s father, likewise the dog's father and grandfather and grandmother. Smuggled over to France by B. himself, that dog had been his companion day and night for months. What could even a gunner Major do against such a wealth of detail, told with an air of convincing candour. He retired discomfited. Another time, when behind the lines, the Colonel cast covetous eyes on a horse belonging to another regiment. Anything in the way of horse-dealing was as a breath of new life to B. A daily visit to the horse lines and a few disparaging remarks to the horse's owner was the method adopted. And, as the continual dropping of water will wear away a stone, so did B. gradually induce the owner of the wanted animal to promise to consider an exchange for the best horse in B.'s own lines. A flat-catcher of the worst description was then selected. Hooded, rugged, bandaged, groomed with vaseline till he shone like a racehorse, kept in for a week on a double ration of corn, he was now stabled in the best stall, and at once caught the visitor's eye, in spite of B.'s plausible efforts to keep him concealed. Efforts so accurately timed so as not to succeed! B. explained almost in tears that he did not think the Colonel would ever dream of parting with that horse, the best they had. With every show of reluctance to the end, the horse was at last given up, and removed in triumph. The coveted one remained permanently in the lines of the regiment; the "exchange" a week later was in the hands of the veterinary surgeon. B. has now returned to his father. I very much hope to see him again, though I think I shall avoid him if I want to buy a horse. I have met Generals too not altogether free from B.'s little weaknesses. Where horses are concerned, no one has any conscience to speak of, not even Generals.

In Germany, with the Army of Occupation, our soldier-servants were mostly of the youthful and irresponsible type. It was marvellous how their cheeriness overcame the morose Germans in the kitchen, the kitchens being the only part of the house we did actually share with them. The soldiers were received at first with scowls, but they soon became the best of friends apparently. I heard one youthful orderly addressing the extremely venerable and dignified German butler, before whose austere glance even I had inwardly quaked, as "grand-dad." One day, having tried in vain, both in German and English, to explain to the German cook that I wanted this youth, she exclaimed at last, "Ach, you mean Villy." I did mean Willy, but it had not struck me to ask for him by that name. The language question appeared to present no difficulty. By dint of treating all Germans as deaf, and shouting English loudly in their ears,

and by an absolute, though cheerful, refusal to even admit that they could not be understood, the problem seemed to solve itself, and all went smoothly in the kitchen.

VII.

I hold the War Office and all it contains in far too much awe to write of it in any spirit of mockery, much less of criticism. It is above laughter, above criticism. I merely admire and envy. A visit there always evokes in me a feeling of childishness, against which I struggle in vain. I try to be calm and collected, and not to give way to the panic that invariably overcomes me, once inside those sacred portals. I start off in a friend's motor-car. I select my richest friend, she who has the largest and most opulent-looking car, which I borrow. This impresses no one, except perhaps the policeman at the door. Even the two-headed Cerberus in the hall does not see my arrival. Nevertheless the motor has given me a slight feeling of self-confidence. I feel less of a worm than if I had walked or gone by 'bus or underground. I did walk once, but at Charing Cross my petticoat came off. My first thought was to rush into Cox's Bank,—I had got so used, during the war, to depend on them for everything. Still, perhaps a petticoat was trying them rather high, so I took a taxi, and, petticoat in hand, returned home, too shaken to try again that day. I suppose the feeling of childishness of which I have complained is partly caused by the fact that I only go to the War Office when I want something. And, as a rule, it is something to which I am not entitled, and which I have little or no hope of obtaining.

After writing my name and business on a card with a perfectly vile pen, I wait while my card goes somewhere—I expect round the corner and back again. There follows an anxious period till my name is called out. Then I follow a guide drearily along passages and up and down stairs, generally at a break-neck speed, till at last I am allowed to sink down on a bench. Again I am asked my business, and my guide disappears. He returns and gives me back my card, with strict injunctions not to lose it, and I am conducted into the presence of the arbiter of my fate. If I get what I want, or anything approaching it, I become effusively grateful—far more so probably than the occasion demands. If I do not get what I want, I crawl away, trying to remember that many a better "man" than myself has suffered a similar fate. One man I know, rather a distinguished soldier, went to the War Office during the war with some small request. The an-

swer given him by the very junior officer he interviewed was as follows: "Please remember that your personal wishes are no factor in the matter." I have never been quite so squashed as that, though doubtless I have deserved it, as he certainly did not. I have tried that same answer several times on my small daughter with great success. It is so complete, it leaves no loophole for argument or expostulation, and, best of all, it awes her into silence.

By the time I have crawled downstairs again after my interview I have, of course, lost my card; and without it I shall not be allowed to leave the building. Under the stern and suspicious eye of the policeman at the door, I search my bag wildly. Powder-puff, mirror, piece of string, and two handkerchiefs, but the card has gone. I must have left it upstairs; I must have dropped it. Visions of days spent aimlessly wandering about the building looking for the hateful thing cross my mind. I dare not go back to the room I have just left to see if it is there. The policeman remarks calmly that it must be found, or he will be compelled to detain me. More awful visions of the War Office for the remainder of my life, and I am still fairly young. At last it is found in my glove, where I had put it for special safety. The policeman thaws, and I am allowed to depart, hoping never, never to have to go there again.

The Military Permit Office in Bedford Square is, or was, another alarming spot. The first time I went to this place I was young and innocent. Having been presented with every form of pass and permit for my visit to Belgium by the various embassies and foreign permit offices, I imagined the British permit office would be a mere formality. I was speedily undeceived. True, my passport, with all its visas, was politely received, but only to be very soon returned to me with an enormous cancelled printed across it. However, in spite of all this, I did get to Belgium and back. "The younger son by devious paths must tread" might equally be said of the officer's wife, at least when trying to join her husband. Germany a couple of months later was much more difficult to achieve. As the man whom I interviewed at the War Office callously explained, it would have been quite different if I had not been married. Marriage appeared to be the one insuperable difficulty to getting out to the Rhine. How I wished that we had concealed the guilty secret! Once more various embassy friends came to the rescue, and I did get into Germany. Not into the "respectable" British zone. Oh no! But into the French and Belgian zones, where my husband could come and see me every week-end. There they appeared to like wives. No one could have been kinder to us than the Belgians when we

were in Brussels in January after the Armistice. True, my husband was a Brigadier-General, but Brussels was full of them in those days. Like silver in the time of Solomon, they were of no account. Nevertheless, the Belgian War Office sent us all round the battlefields in a military car. Those battlefields! I do not think many women saw them as early as I did—two months after the Armistice, when they were still untouched by God or man. I cannot describe them. Far abler pens than mine have done so many times already. I saw too much. In my mind it is all a confused jumble of mile after mile of desolation unspeakable. Wire, overturned tanks, broken aeroplanes, duckboard tracks, skeletons of horses, shell-holes, craters, and, pervading all, noisome mud, with unnameable horrors sticking up out of it. Ruins as at Ypres, or again at other places just a heap of stones, or perhaps only a nameboard, marked what had once been a village. Before I left Brussels the owner of the chateau of Langemark had asked me to look at her much-loved home, which she had not seen for four weary years, and to tell her how it looked, and whether it was much damaged by the war. I did see the chateau of Langemark. At least I saw two or three battered stones and a huge crater full to the brim with mud and water which I was told was the chateau. I am glad I never saw the owner again.

And everywhere the little wooden crosses. The first little wooden cross I saw is my most vivid and unforgettable impression of the wonderful and yet dreadful two days I spent on the battlefields. It was just outside Courtrai, in a ditch; I stopped the car and got out, and knelt beside it. Private ——, the —— Regiment. As I knelt I began to understand, as I had never understood during the whole four years of war, what war really meant—what it had meant to Private ——, what it had meant to me. There are some things too deep for tears or words. Dry-eyed and speechless, I went back to the car. Why had I not brought armfuls of flowers? Why could I not do something to show the dead the pitiful understanding that filled my heart. The little crosses came thick and fast after that—in the ditches, in the fields, on banks, everywhere. I longed to stop the car at each and every one. I hated motoring past. It seemed as if I did not care. But I did care, and "they" know it. Private —— is lying now in one of the big cemeteries that have since been made. But I shall see his cross for always in that ditch outside Courtrai. Nearly two years later I went through the battlefields again—this time by train, which crawled over the uneven railway track. Much had been done by nature as well as by the hand of man. It was a bright moonlight night. There had been a heavy fall of snow; everything was white, very,

very still, and most unutterably peaceful, and like this I want to remember it. I seem to have wandered very far from War Offices, but I shall always be very grateful to the Belgian one for those days given to me in spite of British regulations. It was soon after this that visitors to the battlefields were forbidden by the French and Belgian authorities, and later on it was not the same thing.

It is quite amusing to contrast the methods of the various military officials through whose hands one passes. I may be prejudiced, but there is one feature of the British War Office, and all our other officials, which I do appreciate, and which endears them to my heart in spite of rebuffs and stern refusals of my simple requests, and that is, that whatever time one goes, however soon after or even before breakfast, all the officials appear to have shaved. Possibly this might not excite any one else's admiration or astonishment. But fresh from visits to our gallant Allies, this little fact impressed me tremendously, and with my eyes fixed firmly on the various chins I came across, I thought that perhaps, after all, I did like Englishmen best. The Americans possibly are the most impressive. An American General, sitting sternly at the head of a long table, with twenty typists typewriting madly—and extremely noisily—ten on either side, was a truly wonderful sight. Every detail, large or small, was laid before him personally, from the orders for the move of a brigade, marked with a huge red label RUSH, the American equivalent for our word "urgent," to my own little application to enter the American zone in Germany. In spite of these vast labels, and strong and menacing language, I never heard that things got done any quicker. When an American soldier says "no" he means "no." I remember trying to buy a tin of their very excellent chocolate from an American canteen at Coblenz on a Sunday. The canteen was open, the desired tin within sight—nay, within my reach; but I was not allowed to touch it. It was then 4.30; chocolate could not be sold on Sundays till 5 o'clock. He was a small soldier, but a mixture of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Stonewall Jackson. I basely suggested that no one would know; but he said that he was accountable to his officer, and could not tell a lie. I could not sit and look at that tin for half an hour, so came sadly away.

The following letter is very typical of another charming nation's methods, and of the distinguished man who wrote it. It was written to a certain Commander-in-Chief who we thought might help me to join my husband in Germany, in spite of the British regulations—or it might even have been because of them, I am not sure which, for even the most high

do not always object to a little hit at England.

"Mon General, je me permets de recommander à votre bienveillance, Madame ——. Cette dame, qui est une de nos amies, éprouve quelques difficultés par suite des régléments anglais, à exécuter son projet, aussi suis-je persuadé qu'en s'addressant directement à vous, vous trouveriez facilement le moyen de lui être agréable et utile. Votre auto sous pavillon ——, et un de vos aides de camp la ferait probablement arriver."

I loved this letter. Can you imagine a British Ambassador writing it, or making out my passport endorsed, "nationality none," as this kind friend also did? Imagine, too, the face of a British Commander-in-Chief on receiving such instructions. This other General seemed to take it all as a matter of course. Motor, aide-de-camp and flag were all forthcoming, and I did "execute my project" —*i.e.*, join my husband.

Of course the most delightful thing must be to have a husband at the War Office—to really belong to that sacred edifice, to be one of them, to know everything and everybody, to be able to say with assumed carelessness, "My husband is at the War Office." To feel that Poland may become German or remain Polish, that Ireland may become a republic or merely remain a nuisance, that every railwayman and miner in England, Scotland, and Wales may be out on strike for all you care. None of these things would mean a move for you, but through it all your husband would remain as immovable, and I suppose as inscrutable, as the sphinx. For any man must become inscrutable, or at least look so, at the War Office. Think of the secrets they must know and keep. Why, some one must even know whether there will be any passages available for officers' wives to India or Timbuctoo next trooping season, and other similar things of fearful import to me. Some one possibly may even know whether or not there will be any Army at all next year. As to this last point, though, I do feel slightly reassured, since a well-known Labour member of Parliament I met the other day assured me that when they are in power they are not going to do away with the Army. His statement took a load off my mind. I should hate to join all the other demobilised officers and their wives who play barrel-organs in the streets, the only way I can think of at the moment by which we could earn a living. The fish trade and all its branches, from the great Mac Fisheries to watching over the muddy little fishes in the Nile, is the last refuge of the retired naval officer; but the Army has no such trade to fall back on. Fish is the perquisite of the Navy. Perhaps meat is indicated for the Army, and its connection with butchers would surely please many of the Army Irish critics.

A SHOOTING TRIP IN CHAMBA.

BY F. L. FARRER.

It was the middle of one of the hottest of hot weathers at Agra. Coming out of the mess after luncheon I glanced at the thermometer in the verandah. It registered 110°. As I walked across to my bungalow a wave of fierce heat as from a furnace blast seemed to strike up at me; the merciless white glare seemed to draw one's eyes out of one's head; the air danced and vibrated in the scorching sunlight. Thank heaven, I thought to myself, I have only got two more weeks of this ordeal by fire and then leave —leave for two whole months.

It was too hot to sleep or read or even think. The only thing to be done was to subside under a punkah and get somebody else to think for me. I summoned my familiar in the person of Amir Khan, my Mahommedan servant, to my side. "Talk about cool things," I said. He took the cue at once. There was the pressing question of where the Sahib would spend his leave this year to be decided. Last year we had spent our leave in the jungles of the south. It was true we had had good sport and had escaped malaria, thanks be Allah, but it would not be wise to tempt Fortune in that direction again. The Sahib had spoken of Kashmir and Baltistan, but to achieve anything great in those far hunting-grounds three months' leave at least were required, whereas we had only got two. Without a doubt the place to go to was Chamba. He had visited this glorious mountain land before with a previous master; he knew of a shikari whose name was a household word throughout the country-side. In ten days from starting we should be in the land of black bear, gural, and scrow; in a fortnight in the haunts of red bear and tahr.

Then he launched forth into a glowing eulogy of this heaven upon earth—a country of rushing mountain streams and smiling sunlit valleys; of majestic snow-clad mountains and cool forests of deodar, oak, and pine; of grassy flower-bedecked upland meadows; of fresh life-giving air from the eternal snows; of rhododendrons and wild strawberries; of apricot and walnut trees. He wound up his panegyric with the words: "It's God's own country."

The man was a wizard. I had forgotten the heat. I was drinking in great draughts of pure mountain air. I could smell the delicious fragrant scent of the deodar forests. I could hear the muffled roar of snow-fed mountain torrents. I could see range upon range of forest-clad mountains sweep-

ing up to and losing themselves in the eternal snows and glaciers. "You speak words of honeyed wisdom," I said. "We will start for Chamba this day fortnight." Of all the decisions I have made, I have never made a better.

We had rumbled over the Punjab and Sind Railway to Amritzar. We had jolted over the branch line that leads thence to Pathankote at the base of the foothills of the Himalayas. We had galloped in a tonga uphill and down dale to the accompaniment of rapid hoof-beats and the tuneful call of the horn echoing through the valleys as it gives the warning for "change horses" over the fifty odd miles of military road which separates the latter place from Dalhousie, perched picturesquely on its three mountain-peaks. From here onwards there are only pack-paths, and all baggage has to be carried either by pack-animals or coolies. My shikari, Moula, with his half-brother, Mardawar, who filled the joint rôle of understudy and gun-carrier, had come with a band of retainers from his village in the mountains to meet me and transport my baggage. I took a liking to the man at once. He turned out to be a first-rate shikari. As a boy he had been tiffin-coolie to that mighty hunter, Kinloch, for whom he had an unstinted admiration, regarding him almost in the light of a demigod. For twenty years he had been conducting British officers on shooting expeditions during the leave season, sometimes making two trips in the summer months. He had a wonderful collection of chits, from which I gathered that others had as high an opinion of his attainments as I formed after two months of the most delightful hunting with him. I have met shikaris good, bad, and indifferent. A few there are, finished masters of their craft, who have made a high science of the art of hunting. Moula belonged to this category. These men, while giving full value to the possible eccentricities of individual animals and the hundred and one different factors which can never be disregarded, seem to work on a theory of probabilities, the result of the accumulated experience of years, which ultimately can hardly fail to crown their efforts with success. When they have the requisite intelligence to enable them to analyse their actions—there are many who act from instinct, and are unable to give an explanation of the considerations which govern them in making a decision—and are sufficiently generous to give one an insight into their craft, then there are few more fascinating companions.

When hunting with them one has the conviction that they are never working at haphazard, that when they draw blank their failure only stimulates them to greater efforts,

and that in the end their systematised knowledge cannot fail to triumph over the most evasive of the animals they hunt. If one has the good fortune to obtain the services of one of these experts, then every hour, every day, of one's hunting is of engrossing interest.

We left Dalhousie, and dropped down through beautiful forests of deodars to Kirjiah, a miniature gem of the Himalayas, where there is a charming little rest-house nestling snugly in a grassy cup of the forest-clad hills. A deep pool occupies the centre of this charmed circle of emerald-green turf, which sweeps up to an amphitheatre of dark hanging deodar woods.

Next morning, continuing our march through the forest, we came to the edge of the highlands a few miles from Kirjiah, whence, looking down across the valley of the Ravee river, one gets one's first glimpse of the capital of Chamba picturesquely situated on a plateau, the only level area of any size in the state, with a background of mountains behind it. To the front of the town there is a wide expanse of lawn-like turf. Below that the cliffs of the plateau drop to the rushing river. The Rajah's white palace occupies the central position, and the houses of his subjects cluster around it.

At the western end of the town there is a dak-bungalow, from the garden of which one sees, below the cliffs, the rushing and tumbling river, carrying on its surface baulks of timber, which are floated downstream to the Punjab.

The magnificent forests of oak, deodar, and pine are leased from the State by Government.

Two of the five great Punjab rivers from which the province takes its name water the State, the Ravee and the Chenab.

Arriving at Chamba at midday, I went in the evening to see the Mean Sahib Bhuri Singh, the Rajah's private secretary, a keen sportsman, who has extended a kindly welcome and given the benefit of his advice to many a British officer who has had the good fortune to visit that beautiful country.

The next three days we travelled on well-kept bridle roads overlooking smiling cultivated valleys. It was harvest-time. Crops of wheat, barley, and maize were being gathered. The little flat-roofed houses nestled on the hillsides amidst their tiny cultivation terraces and orchards of apricot and walnut trees. On the roof-tops golden Indian corn was spread out to dry, making, with the crimson of the millet now ripening in the fields, vivid splashes of colour in the landscape. Miniature mountain cattle grazed on the hill-slopes, their bells tinkling musically as they moved. Here and there a herd-boy, stretched beneath some spreading chestnut-tree, played merrily on his pipe as he watched his flock of sheep

and goats. From below came the subdued roar of the snow-fed torrent far down the valley.

One day on the road we met gay parties of hillmen and women laughing and singing as they hurried on their way to a mela or country fête, a very popular form of entertainment in Chamba. The women wore bright-coloured little caps of red or yellow, which in some cases were adorned with rough-cut turquoises. Many of them had necklaces of coral, to which were attached small silver charms. The younger women wore their hair in three plaits. Some of them were by no means unprepossessing in appearance. The men were dressed in loose tunics of puttoo, the homespun of the hills. Often a flower would be stuck jauntily above the ear under the turban. A jovial happy people they seemed to be. Other wayfarers we met were Mahommedan Gujars from Jammu, dark-bearded men of a strongly Semitic type of feature, driving their great water-buffaloes to pastures up on the mountain-side. There is an annual summer immigration of these people into Chamba, where they rent grazing on the upland meadows. Accompanied by their families, they seemed to lead a pleasant gipsy life encamped in some oak wood beside a mountain stream, watching their huge beasts grow fatter day by day on the succulent flower-bedecked grassy margs of the mountain-sides.

Part of the Central Asian trade-route runs through Chamba. Wheeled transport is of course out of the question, and the merchandise, consisting for the most part of wool, borax, and brick tea, is carried on hardy little ponies and donkeys, sheep and goats being pressed into the service where the going is too bad for the larger pack-animals. In a country where newspapers are a minus quantity these traders are the natural purveyors of news. Moula, who had been up and down the country for many years on shooting expeditions, was well known to many of them. Most of the caravan owners that I met were Lahoulis, sturdy mountaineers of a pronounced Mongolian cast of countenance, an interesting and much-travelled class of men, and well worth talking to, for their business leads them over one of the most difficult and dangerous trade-routes of the world. We would often rest on the way and spend half an hour chatting with them. A gift of molasses-sweetened tobacco, a luxury much appreciated amongst these mountain folk, served to pave the way for friendly intercourse. Strange tales they had to tell of their journeys over stupendous mountain passes, of avalanches, snow blizzards and glaciers, of pack-animals lost over precipices, of flooded rivers and dizzy mountain paths sometimes cut out of the sheer rock of the precipice, some-

times bracketed to its face, of forced marches to reach the passes before the snows of winter closed them. They travel annually to Leh, in Ladakh, which is an important trading entrepôt. Here they meet traders from Yarkand, on the other side of the roof of the world, with whom they exchange goods, buying and selling. Then in the latter part of the summer they bring their merchandise down to Kulu, Pathankote, and Amritzar, returning with loads of salt and grain to the interior. One that I talked to had been over the Karakoram Pass to far Yarkand.

Two days' march from Chamba I had my first shot at mountain game. My camp was pitched above a rushing mountain torrent, which further down the valley passed through a narrow rocky gorge. We descended half-way down its precipitous slope. Moula gave a grunt of satisfaction. A gural, the chamois of the Himalayas, was feeding amongst the scrub that clothed the opposite side of the gorge. I could see nothing. Sitting behind Moula, I got him to align the rifle on the exact spot, and then taking the rifle, kept my gaze fixed upon the point indicated. Still I could not pick up the quarry. Then an ear flickered, and, as in a child's picture-puzzle, the gural's form stood out from its surroundings. I brought off the shot all right, but the animal fell headlong into the torrent below, and we never recovered him.

We did two days' more marching, and then spent two or three days after gural before going on to tahr ground. Very fascinating sport I found the stalking of this wily little goat antelope. It is a good preparation for the pursuit of the larger goats, both from the point of view of training the eyesight to detect an extraordinarily elusive little animal and of cultivating a "head" for bad ground. I succeeded in getting a couple of them. One was an old solitary male very dark in colour, the other was a younger animal.

We had left the lower valleys and the last village behind us, and were up on the mountain heights. Towards evening, following a sheep-path over the grassy margs, we arrived at our camping-place at the head of a nullah, whence we were to explore the adjoining nullah for tahr. Dusk was coming on, but while the coolies were pitching the tents the indefatigable Moula went off to spy out the precipitous slopes just over the crest. In a short time I saw him returning; there was a buoyancy in his step which convinced me that he was the bearer of good news. He had seen two fine male tahr on the khud-side below our camping-ground. Light was failing, and it would not be worth while to risk a shot, but to-morrow before dawn we would be in position. I suggested

that they might have gone by then. "No," he said; "they are settling down for the night, and to-morrow, if Kudir wills, one or both of them will be ours."

I felt an irresistible desire to see them. Apart altogether from shooting, there is to most of us a strong fascination in seeing big game in their own wild haunts, especially in the case of such animals as these great mountain goats, which have their habitat in such inaccessible ground. One feels that, as in their pursuit there must be so many occasions on which they having seen you first, deny you a sight of themselves, any opportunity of turning the tables upon them is not to be missed. After ten minutes' walk we halted. Moula, removing his turban, crawled on all-fours to the edge of the cliff, and then, lying prone, peered downwards into the gathering gloom. After a few seconds' scrutiny he motioned me to his side. Immediately below us, at a distance of perhaps 150 yards, on a razor-backed spur clad with stunted scrub, I could just distinguish two animals. I was surprised at their size. They looked as large as donkeys. One of them was lying down; the other was standing up, as though on sentinel duty. Below their position the ridge terminated abruptly in a precipice. Very carefully we withdrew from our spying-ground and returned to camp. We decided to dispense with fires that night, and the coolies were enjoined to keep strict silence.

An hour before sunrise my servant called me. I dressed hastily, and before many minutes had elapsed Moula, Mardawar, and myself were picking our way carefully to our position. It was still dark when we arrived there, and we sat down and waited with what patience we could muster. Then the half-light which precedes the dawn spread over earth and sky. In the woods below a kuklass crowed hoarsely, and, borne on the still morning air, came the faint sound of a muntjac barking far down the valley behind us. In another few minutes the sun would be up.

We crept forward and looked over the edge. The tahr had shifted slightly from the position of the night before. One of them was standing motionless on a rocky boulder gazing into the abyss below; the other was nibbling at the top of a scrubby bush.

Moula indicated the former as the larger of the two. Mardawar gripped me by the ankles, and I wriggled a little further forward. Then with infinite care I brought the Mannlicher to my shoulder, and, gritting my teeth and holding my breath, drew a bead through the Lyman sight behind the big tahr's shoulder. Bang! The report went echoing and re-echoing in the amphitheatre of hills around us. The big tahr took one bound off the rock.

"No hit," said Moula. It would be difficult to say whether disappointment, annoyance, or compassion predominated in his accents.

The other tahr had disappeared simultaneously into dead ground. I riveted my gaze on to a parallel ridge which they were bound to cross. For three strides one of them was in view, going at lightning speed. I took a hasty snap at him over the open sights, and had the mortification to see my bullet strike a rock behind him. Then he took a headlong dive into what appeared to be space. There was no sign of the other. Where could he have got to? I brought my gaze back to the rock. Suddenly a black leg appeared waving on the far side of it. Then it ceased to wave and remained rigid. That was all one could see, but the big tahr must be lying on his back in his death agonies, nay, even now dead, behind the rock. Thanks be to Allah! Moula was profuse in his congratulations. We were a happy party that morning.

I returned to camp and a leisurely breakfast. Moula and Mardawar, accompanied by two of the coolies, went off to retrieve the tahr. An hour later he was lying in front of the tent. He was a dark slaty grey in colour, very compactly built, and with remarkably sturdy limbs,—a noble-looking animal, with something of the rugged grandeur of his own wild haunts about him. His horns measured twelve inches. At this time of the year they do not carry the heavy coats which are theirs earlier in the season. As trophies their heads, compared with those of the ibex and the markhor, are insignificant, yet as a daring mountain climber, who finds foothold in the most impossible places, he is the equal, if not the superior, of either of his kinsmen, and as such is a valued trophy to those who have followed him in his precipitous haunts. Thanks to Moula's intimate local knowledge—he had seen tahr on this khud during a previous shooting expedition—I had secured this my first tahr with an entire absence of the arduous climbing usually associated with their pursuit, but for many days after I toiled over the most alarming ground in vain.

We spent the morning of that day skinning the tahr. In the afternoon we went up to a rocky bluff above the camp to survey the surrounding country through our glasses. We had not been up there long when Moula spotted a black bear crossing an open space in an oak wood below us. Unlike his cousin the red bear, the black bear's sight and hearing are sharp. In both the powers of scent are remarkable. As far as the black bear is concerned, this power of scent is, I think, more pronounced in the case of those members of the tribe who remain at the higher elevations and do not go down to the vicinity of villages during the harvest

season, where doubtless their constant proximity to humans serves to blunt the acuteness of this sense. In any case, I noticed that Moula took very careful stock of the direction of the wind before stirring from our spying-ground.

The position of the bear we had just seen offered excellent opportunities for a stalk. The ground was undulating, and there were scattered clumps of rhododendrons in his vicinity. Of wind there was little, and that little was blowing uphill. *Ceteris paribus*, Moula had a strong predilection for approaching bears from higher ground rather than from below.

We set off at once, and the stalk came off admirably. Taking advantage of an opportune fold in the ground, we got within thirty yards of him. He was feeding on acorns behind a rhododendron bush. I waited until he came into the open, and then gave him one behind the shoulder. He collapsed, and started rolling down the hill, but knowing the black bear's extraordinary tenacity of life, I thought it well to give him another as he rolled. A convenient rhododendron clump arrested his further progress. He was a well-grown male in splendid condition, with a particularly fine growth of glossy black hair, due no doubt to the fact that he had remained at a high elevation at a season when most of his tribe were down in the valleys on their annual harvest-time junketings.

That was a red-letter day. We had bagged a tahr and a black bear, each of them within a mile of camp. The oak-wood that was the scene of the latter's demise was full of kuklass and monal pheasants. We had gone out before dawn one morning to be in readiness to watch some gural ground at break of day. From a sweep of lawn-like turf a mass of frowning rocky cliffs rose majestically in front of us, resembling in the faint half-light the façade of some vast cathedral. We lay concealed behind a rampart of rock. Then rosy-fingered dawn, as with a magician's wand, touched the whole scene into light. On a little grassy terrace on the hill-slopes immediately below us a cock monal, all unconscious of our presence, emerged from a giant rhododendron clump to salute the dawn. He was so close that we could see every feather of his gorgeous plumage. A thousand dewy diamonds sparkled in his path as the slanting sun-rays lit up his wealth of colouring—the bright iridescent green of his perfectly poised head, the rich bronze of his graceful neck, the purple of his breast, and the cinnamon of his tail feathers, this riot of colour throwing into strong relief the plumage of his back, white as driven snow. As in some stately minuet, this gay gallant paced it up and down the terrace. He postured, pivoted, and passaged. He strutted with the superb arrogance of the exquisite dandy. Two or three hen pheasants

were just inside the cover busily engaged in foraging, digging with their beaks into the soft earth in search of grubs. The lavish display of their lord seemed to be entirely lost upon them. From the oak-woods below there floated up the sweet mellow call of a hen monal, a long-drawn plaintive note. The cock pheasant paused in his stately walk; the little green aigrets on his head quivered as he listened. Again came the sweet melodious call. He took three quick steps to the edge of the terrace and, shooting into the air, went flashing down the nullah, the golden sunlight playing on his resplendent plumage—a glorious bird, fit denizen of this most glorious Himalaya.

On rocky wind-swept heights as one passes from one nullah to another there are often to be seen small cairns built of stones and fragments of rock with a stick stuck in the middle, to which are tied strips of coloured cloth and rags, the tribute of wayfarers. Handfuls of wild flowers will be found scattered round the base of these rude structures, which are built in honour of the goddess Dévi, spouse of Siva the omnipotent. I had seen various portrayals of Dévi—in Southern India a beautiful and arrogant-looking woman riding on a tiger; in Bengal a creature of terror, more like a Fury than a goddess, her countenance streaming with blood, and, Medusa-like, encircled with snakes. At her temple near Calcutta a thousand goats are said to be sacrificed every month to appease her wrath. I was interested to learn what was the mood of such a tigress amongst these jovial care-free hill-folk. "She is always laughing," said Moula; "she peeps at you from behind rocks. Sometimes she appears as a beautiful girl, sometimes as a toothless hag. Shepherds make offerings of flowers to her to ensure the safety of their flocks, when grazing high up on the mountain-sides, from plundering bear or marauding leopard. Travellers and traders do well to propitiate her, that they may not lose their pack-animals over precipices, and that they may reach their journey's end in safety. Hunters, above all, must pay tribute to bespeak her good-will, for the tahr of the rugged mountains and the gural of the lower hills are Dévi's goats."

We had set off before dawn to explore some likely tahr ground. The early morning had been clear and fine, but as often happens in August, two hours after sunrise heavy white clouds hung low on the mountain-tops.

After a two hours' climb we sat down and swept the surrounding mountain-sides with our glasses. Some tahr were feeding on the opposite side of a narrow gorge below the cloud-line. By following a spur on our side we might reach a point within range where the gorge was at its narrowest, but there was no cover, and we should be in

full view of the tahr in approaching, so we decided to wait in the hope that they might shift their position. While we waited the question was settled for us. A wrack of thick white cloud swept up the gorge, obliterating the view of the opposite mountain-side. Under its cover we might descend the spur to a point immediately opposite the tahr, and then wait in position until the mist cleared. Very cautiously we crept down the spur. Every minute the mist grew thicker, fresh clouds rolled up. Here, isolated from things terrestrial, we sat in a damp world of cloud. It was as though we occupied the front row of the stalls with the curtain down waiting interminably for the play to begin. The troupe that was to take part in this pastoral play was on the stage right enough. Every now and then in the stillness of that cotton-wool atmosphere one could hear a displaced pebble or fragment of rock rattling down as the tahr moved in feeding. Sometimes our hopes were raised by some slight clearing of the atmosphere, only to be dashed again by the appearance of fresh wracks seething up the gorge. We waited till 3 P.M., at which time, as there seemed but little chance of any clearance, we reluctantly decided to abandon our vigil. Said Moula, philosophical as ever, "Dévi has drawn a curtain from heaven to protect her goats. Let us return to camp. To-morrow I will buy a village goat, and sacrifice it to win her favour."

We spent days of strenuous climbing in the surrounding country without getting a sight of tahr. Then we shifted camp and did a long day's march. As I came out of my tent the morning after our arrival on our new hunting-ground, there was presented to my view a grim rugged nullah unrelieved by trees or grassy slopes, save for a few patches of scant herbage on the steep precipice-side, where projecting buttresses of rock gave some shelter from the icy cutting wind that even now in August seemed always to be sweeping through this inhospitable place, where drifts of last year's snow lay still unmelted in some of the deeper gullies.

My camp was pitched on a small shelving plateau, the only comparatively flat surface in the whole of this wild area. Great gaunt boulders and masses of rock riven from the mountain-side by some mighty winter avalanche were piled up on the lower slopes, which jutted out from the sheer precipice at the bottom of the nullah. Why the tahr had chosen such a feeding-ground, Heaven only knows. Perhaps they had been driven from their more favourite haunts by the flocks of goats and sheep which at this time of the year were invading the high altitudes close up to the snow-line; perhaps some leopard had been persistently preying upon the herd on some more sheltered

forest-clad mountain-side, and they had sought this barren refuge where they would be the better able to detect and frustrate the movements of their enemy. In any case, here they were in force—fathers of the flock, females, and young ones. Since our first kill we had been searching for them assiduously. We had been out day after day on long tramps over the mountains. Then one day, having compassed a big range of country, we had sat down to lunch at the head of this nullah. We had found what we had been looking for. We shifted camp at once. Here one never heard the joyous crow of kuklass at dawn or the melodious call of monal. Grim silence reigned supreme.

I was sitting at lunch in front of my tent preparatory to starting out to explore our new ground during the afternoon. A shrill whistle sounded from the precipitous escarpment above me. I looked up. A grand old tahr poised on a narrow ledge of rock was surveying my camp with haughty displeasure. As I moved my head to look at him, he was gone, vanishing round a projecting buttress of rock with a speed that on such impossible ground seemed little short of miraculous. I suppose he was treading on something, but there didn't seem to be foothold for a cat. It is these amazing displays which give such a fascination to the pursuit of tahr. Whether you shoot one or not, you will be treated to an exhibition of dare-devil precipice-running which has to be seen to be believed.

During the next two days we saw the herd, but they were taking no risks, and persistently occupied inaccessible ground. On the afternoon of the third day they had descended to better ground. At the time we saw them they were on the opposite side of the nullah in a narrow re-entrant. Through the glasses we picked out what appeared to be the big male of the herd. He was feeding in solitary state on a little grassy patch which sloped downwards from the precipice-face with a pitch as steep as the roof of a house. The rest of the herd, some younger males, does, and kids, were feeding below him. At some two hundred yards from his position a bold bluff jutted out from the mountain-side. If we moved well to a flank under cover on our side of the nullah we could cross it, and then climbing to a point rather above their position we might work our way laterally under cover of the bluff along the face of the cliffs, which were jagged and serrated with ridges of rock, to the angle of the re-entrant in which the tahr were feeding. The climb up the opposite side was stiff going, but when we reached the point we had marked and had to move laterally, then the trouble began. The starting-point from which the ledges and ridges of rock offered the best approach was some two

hundred yards from the bluff. Every step had to be taken with the greatest care; a slip would have been fatal. Moula, Mardawar, and a coolie lad named Mullock who accompanied us, had removed their grass-shoes. In going over bad ground these hillmen use their big toes to grip with as though they were thumbs. Moula led the procession, moving from rock to rock and ledge to ledge more like a goat than a man, indicating to me each foothold. In bad places Mullock moved below me, supporting my foothold with one hand, while he held on to some projection with the other. Moula gave me a hand from above. Mardawar brought up the rear with the rifle. Before we had gone fifty yards, in spite of an icy-cold wind, I am not ashamed to say I was wet with perspiration. It was caused not so much by exertion as by the perilous nature of our position. However, we were in for it now. Moula and the others were as calm and self-possessed as if they were moving on the flat roofs of one of their own houses. The only thing to be done was to concentrate one's mind on the planting of each step, and try to imagine one was a goat. The first hundred yards were the worst. After that distance had been accomplished there was better foothold, and we reached our point in safety. Before attempting to look at our quarry I had to take five minutes' rest to recover my moral. Then I climbed up to where Moula was lying flat looking into the re-entrant. The tahr was further from us than I thought he would be when first we planned our stalk. I judged him to be three hundred yards. He was probably not more than two hundred and fifty. It was a longer shot than I liked, but it was quite out of the question to attempt to get nearer. If we stirred from our present position we should be spotted at once by one of the females. Moula nudged me. I followed his glance. Already one of them had ceased feeding, and was looking about uneasily. Without more ado I took a very careful sight through the Lyman, and squeezed the trigger. I saw the tahr flinch. "Just over," hissed Moula; "quick, another." A shrill whistle rang out below us. As I recharged the Mannlicher and slammed the Lyman flat, the whole herd stampeded downwards. Before I could get on to him again the big tahr had taken one powerful spring off the slope and dropped on to a ridge some twenty feet below. As he landed, Moula gave a shrill whistle, an exact reproduction of the danger signal we had just heard. In mid-career the great goat pulled up short. He was as yet uncertain from what quarter danger threatened. One of his sentries must have been left behind. That momentary pause sealed his fate. My bullet sped true this time, and with one mighty bound he sprang out into space, dropping

some hundred feet below, and then rolling over and over down the steep khud-side until he brought up against a rocky boulder, and there lay still. There are some pictures which are graven deep upon the tablets of one's mind. That tahr's last great leap is one of them. I don't know who was the most pleased, Moula or myself. If ever a shikari saved the situation for a bungling sportsman, it was then. "Your whistle killed him," I said. His honest face beamed an appreciation of my thanks.

We watched the herd disappear in their break-neck career, leaping, balancing, and dropping, both young and old accomplishing the most amazing acrobatic feats in an easy off-hand flippant manner that absolutely beggars all powers of description. Finally, they reached a long sloping strip of shale, down which they charged at racing speed in mass formation.

We were able to descend by a less alarming route, comparatively speaking—it was bad enough to necessitate my accomplishing the greater part of it in a sitting posture. This tahr was of a much browner shade than the one I had shot before. Old males vary considerably in their colouring. His horns were slightly longer than those of the other.

We had left the tahr nullah and were concentrating all our energies on the quest of red bear. So far we had been unsuccessful. It was early in September. We had had a long day's climbing on the previous day, and had been out before dawn that morning. I was spending a lazy afternoon in camp amidst idyllic surroundings. On the other side of the miniature valley in which my camp was pitched grassy slopes rose in gentle undulations and folds. Over their crest in the brilliantly clear atmosphere the snow-capped mountains of Lahoul stood out clear-cut against an azure blue sky. Behind the camp a forest of alder and silver birch, already mellowing to the gold of autumn, clothed the steep mountain-side. The scent of wild thyme hung heavy on the air. From the cliffs above the camp came the pleasant plash of a waterfall and the soothing murmur of the stream in its pebbly bed. Away up on the hill-slopes a herd-boy was playing on his pipe some old-world love melody. Clearly in the stillness of the afternoon the notes rose and fell, now urgent and compelling, now plaintive and persuasive. A brilliant splash of moving crimson on the emerald sward, which fringed the stream some little way below the camp, caught my eye. I turned my glasses on to it. Yes, there he was, the western horned pheasant, the so-called Argus, Tragopan Melanocephalus to give him his high-sounding Greek appelation, named after the mythical goat pan bird of Pliny. Crimson as to his head and neck, his chest the colour of a flaming sunset, dappled with little white

spots each delicately margined with black, he appeared the true spirit of the woods in autumn. Above his black-crested head the little blue Satyr-like horns stood up. It must be Pan that I heard piping. If presently he and his goat-footed Satyrs and attendant nymphs danced out from the birch-woods to the banks of this sylvan stream, they could not have a more perfect setting.

That evening, sitting over the camp-fire under the brilliant constellation of a Himalayan night, I broached the subject of Pan to Moula. Herdsman and hunter, keen student of nature that he was, I felt convinced that I should strike a responsive chord. I was not disappointed. "We call him Krishna," he said; "he is the god of flocks and herds, he sports and dances with the gopis (milkmaids), and plays upon his pipe."

A drizzling rain was falling as we reached our next camping-place; in single file we were slipping and floundering down a steep mountain-path. All depression vanished when Moula's hawk-like eye descried two blurred figures feeding far away on the uppermost slopes of the opposite side of the nullah. "Lal bhalu" (red bear), he said. What a thrill those two words have given many a Himalayan sportsman! His growing scarcity adds zest to his discovery. There is a romantic fascination about him, haunting as he does the grassy uplands that border on the eternal snows—a mystery in the long sleep with which he defies the rigours of winter, when snow and ice have laid the grip of death upon his feeding-grounds—a paradox in his coming to life again, when the soft zephyrs of spring have melted the snows on mountain-slopes and flowers spring up in myriads to grace the grassy margs on which he loves to delve. How exquisite is the Himalayan flora in spring—little gems of blue and red and cream mingling with yellow lady's slipper, purple vetch, and crimson clover!

Next morning broke clear and fine after the rain. As soon as it was light I turned my glasses on the hill-slopes where we had seen the bears the night before. A prolonged survey of the surrounding country failed to reveal them. "They have gone into the next nullah," said Moula. We decided to put in a long day looking for them, and set out, taking provisions for the day with us. At this time of the year red bear usually feed from 6 A.M. to 8 A.M. They then retire to some cool woodland glade for a siesta, reappearing between 3 and 4 P.M., when they feed on till dusk. A three hours' tramp brought us to the further nullah. It appeared to be ideal ground for red bear. On the steep mountain-sides thick clustering coppices of fir and pine, with clumps of rhododendron and other undergrowth, were relieved with open grassy slopes. Here and there, showing up

against the green, was the nishan of red bear, patches of brown earth thrown up where they had been conducting their foraging excavations. We lunched and rested till 3 P.M., from which hour onwards we made an exhaustive search of the nullah in all its many ramifications, but no bear were to be seen. We reached camp after dusk. One of the coolies who had been down to a distant village for milk reported that the male bear was a sheep-killer. In the summer the villagers send their sheep under the charge of a shepherd high up on the mountain-slopes to graze. During the last fortnight he had carried off three sheep, visiting the fold at dusk. Once having acquired a taste for mutton, he had become so bold that the shepherd had been obliged to take his flock elsewhere.

We decided to move camp to a place more convenient for commanding both nullahs. Having carried out this programme, we set out at 3 P.M. to watch the place where we had originally seen them. Again we were disappointed, but as we were making for camp Moula spotted them on a distant slope of the adjoining nullah. We visited this feeding-ground the following morning, leaving camp at 4 A.M., and had our journey for nothing. We had before starting told one of the coolies to watch their original feeding-place that morning. When we returned to camp at midday we were delighted to hear that they were back at their old place. Our informant had watched them retire into some scrubby jungle about 8 A.M. This was good news. The place was only about a mile from camp. We set off at 2 P.M., and arriving on our ground took up a position of observation. At 3.30 P.M., to our delight, the two bears came out of a thicket and recommenced their excavating operations amongst some low bushes on the hillside. The red bear has indifferent sight and hearing, but very keen scenting powers. We made a detour to come at them from up-wind. We had carefully marked their position, but the scrub was fairly thick when we got into it, and I was beginning to think they had once more given us the slip, when at twenty paces' distance, having either got our wind or heard us, the pair of them reared themselves up on their hind legs and confronted us. The female, the first to recover from her surprise, dropped on all-fours, and, loudly barking her annoyance, was off like a flash. The big bear paused a second or two longer. He presented an ideal target, and I gave him a bullet full in the chest. He fell backwards with a crash, and, save for a few spasmodic movements, lay still. Moula threw a stone or two at him to ensure that he was beyond giving trouble, and then we went up to examine him. He was in grand condition, in colour a lightish brown, tipped with silver. He had a beautiful ruff of thick

fur round his neck. He measured 6 feet 6 inches from snout to tip of tail. It had taken us a week's hard work to find him, but he was well worth it.

We skinned him and left his carcase *in situ*.

The sequel to his demise was rather curious. Two days later, in the afternoon, we had occasion to pass close to the place on our way to some tahr ground. Out of curiosity I turned aside to have a look at the carcase. Suddenly I heard the crack of a twig, and saw the female bear disappearing in some thick undergrowth. She was much smaller than her mate, and I let her go in peace. I hope she lived to do her duty to the red bear community by bringing two nice cubs into the world the following spring. On investigation, we found that she had eaten practically the whole of her late lamented. Her tracks were plain where she had dug her claws into the soft earth to obtain a purchase whilst stripping the flesh from his ribs.

The colouring of red bear varies considerably with individuals. One that I shot early in April was almost cream-coloured. He had a splendid thick coat, the hair on the back being seven inches long, but underneath this wealth of fur he was as thin as a rake. He had probably only just come to life again after his long winter sleep. Another very big bear that I saw at the same season and in the same locality was a dark red in colour.

I have very pleasant recollections of this red bear camp. My tent was pitched just outside a miniature oak wood. A little stream meandered down the hillside, rippling amidst rocks o'ergrown with moss and choicest maidenhair, in places overflowing its narrow ill-defined bed, and squandering itself in indecisive fashion on the gentle hill-slopes. I was returning to camp one evening through this oak wood, and had exchanged the rifle for the gun. Suddenly as I came to the brook, there was a flutter and scurry of wings. "Mark cock," rang out in clear incisive tones behind me. The warning, familiar, yet strangely unfamiliar in these surroundings, had its usual electrifying effect. I made a clean miss with the first barrel, and downed the long bill with the second, just before he had time to put the trunk of an oak-tree between himself and me. Moula, as pleased as myself, retrieved the bird, and presented me with the little pin-feather of the wing. These were the only two English words I ever heard him use. He had learnt them from one of his sahibs who had shot woodcock here two years before. This oak wood, with its swampy slopes, was a favourite resort of cock. They seemed to be attracted by my camp-fire, and would often fly round and round the camp at dusk.

The game-bird list of Chamba is a rich one. The monal and

horned pheasant are strictly preserved, but there are three other varieties of pheasant—the cheer, the white-crested kaleeg, and the koklass—which may all be shot. In addition to these, there are four varieties of partridges. That magnificent bird, the Himalayan snow-cock, known to the natives as Ram Chukor, heads the list. King of all the partridges, almost equalling in size the capercaillie, in summer he lives at great elevations, frequenting with burrhel and snow-leopard the snow-fields of the roof of the world. In winter he descends to lower elevations. Moula had frequently seen him in that season. Then there is the snow-partridge, also living at high elevations in summer; and that fine sporting bird, the chukor, and the common hill partridge. Last, but by no means least from the culinary point of view, are the red jungle-fowl and the blue pigeon.

Of larger game, besides those already mentioned, the hungal or Kashmir stag, found on the western side of Chamba bordering on Kishtawar, and musk-deer, are preserved. The serow, that curious skulking animal, resembling nothing so much as an incarnation of the Evil One, is to be found on thick forest-clad hills. Also the muntjac or barking-deer. Leopards are numerous but seldom seen, and there is a sporting chance of shooting a snow-leopard if you are lucky. Ibex have their habitat in Chamba Lahoul.

"Chuck, chuck, chuck, chukoor; chuck, chuck, chuck, chukoor. Fine fat bouncing birds are we!" The defiant challenge rang out from the stony hillside above my tent, reiterated again and again. My leave was drawing to a close, and I was on the march back to civilisation. There was an hour or so of daylight left, and I thought that a nice plump partridge would figure well on the evening menu. I looked up the bare hillside. There was nothing but stones and rocks to be seen, but the boisterous conversazione going on above served to indicate the area occupied by the birds. Often as I had failed before, I could not resist the challenge. A big boulder poised on the hillside seemed to offer a likely line of approach. I moved to a flank for some distance, then climbed the hill, and came into the open from behind the rock above my tent. Whirr, whirr! The covey rose, and went streaking down the hillside. One fell to my first barrel; the other was a clean miss. I watched them settle half a mile down the valley. "Chuck, chuck, chuck, chukoor; chuck, chuck, chuck, chukoor. Come and try your luck again; come and try your luck again." I accepted their invitation, not then, but in the following spring, when the call of the Himalaya lured me to its soul-satisfying solitudes once again.

THE SWORDSMAN.

BY A. S. M. HUTCHINSON.

THIS is how Old Wirk tells a story:

"I fot at the ba'le o' Waterloo-oo-oo."

Some explanation is needed. Old Wirk manifestly never fought at the battle of Waterloo. But he imagines he did. He is eighty. He is in his dotage. He has never been out of Penny Green in his life, and his father was never out of it before him. But his grandfather fought at Waterloo. His grandfather, it is clear, over and over again told his infant grandson that story, and many another story of his life and times; and now Old Wirk, living again his childhood, reproduces stories precisely as, in that childhood, he had them from his grandfather's lips. He never, in telling things told him by his grandfather, says, "My granfer did so and so." He always says, "I did so and so," and, when reasoned with, can by no means be made to believe that he didn't.

Thus comes "I fot at Waterloo-oo-oo"; and the reduplication of the final syllable is because Old Wirk was some years ago presented by public subscription with a set of false teeth; and they get unshipped with certain articulations, and his cheeks and his chin and his tongue churn them round and round while his listeners sit patiently for him to catch and control them and get on with it. But he is very proud of his false teeth, and never takes them out except for his meals, a singularity that gave some offence to those who had subscribed for the teeth; but as Old Wirk said, "I've ate wi' me gooms these score years or more, an' I never can ate clean an' sharp an' healthy not but only with me goo-oo-ooms."

Old Wirk owns and lives at the forge on Penny Green. He is long past work at the anvil, but he still can do a turn at the bellows; and for the rest he sits all day on his bench beside the forge, ceaselessly moving his jaws round and round and round, and in the mind behind his extraordinarily bright blue eyes (clear and shining as a child's), revolving round and round and round a hopelessly confused mixture of his own youth, of his father's youth, and of his grandfather's youth.

Precisely at seven every summer evening he crosses the road to the Tybar Arms, and there sits with his pot of ale and the sires of the village, contributing his part to the debates, and, when these touch the past, doing so as the contemporary of those whose tombs are already overgrown and misshapen in the churchyard up the lane.

It was on one such evening that young Mark Sabre (who told me this), recently come to live at Penny Green and much appealed to by the antiquities of the village, material and corporeal, asked Old Wirk what was the story of the ghost which was supposed to haunt the Green and to walk it on summer nights, its head beneath its arm.

"Mrs Pithycomb told me," said Sabre, "it was some way connected with that green patch where the children never play" —and he pointed to a vivid brightness in the Green's burnt summer aspect about which lay the remains of wooden rails which one time had fenced it off. "Is that right, Mr Wirk?"

Old Wirk churned his cheeks and tongue and chin, and might be imagined churning also the confused medley within his brain.

"Ou-ai," said Old Wirk, "ou-ai. That's right enough. Green's harnted. Green's harnted, as many a frighted soul 'a seen with his own eyes. Willie Pringle harnts un, an' yon patch with the rails is where a' lies an' where a' rises. Ou-ai, Willie Pringle was buried in churchyard, an' stone stands there for any man to see. But Willie Pringle no lies there. Earth hadn't laid on Willie Pringle mor'n a week when four very old and sober men, sitting on this very bench on a full-moon night, saw Willie's awful shape up out of yonder place and seek his head and find it lying there and start towards them, head under arm, for to ask them join it to his shoulders. Ou-ai, they run, they run like young chaps for all their rheumatics. Ou-ai, they surely did, for I met un running; an' ever after Willie Pringle in's chosen time has rise there an' took his head an' walked the Green for one to join it for un. An' never will rest till he finds one, for that's the curse that's set on un."

Sabre asked, "How came he to lose his head, Mr Wirk?"

"Why, be sure, be sure, that's a tale I've told 'ee a twoscore times an' more. 'Tis a terrible tale, to be sure, an' a grave warning to maid an' man alike. Willie Pringle lost his head after Corporal Harry come home from the great ba'le o' Waterloo-oo-oo.

"Ou-ai, ou-ai, I fot at Waterloo-oo-oo. Drab take these teeth o' mine! Corporal Harry an' me, we fot together at Waterloo. 'Here they be coming, Zack,' shouts Corporal Harry in me ear; and surely there they were, they Frenchies, thundering on their great enormous horses of war, and waving their great enormous swords, and shouting in the language of theirs which no man can understand, and which was put on them in confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel.

"Ou-ai, they were most terrible and mighty to look upon, and the hoofs of their horses smote the ground like thunder. Down they come upon us. I were in the fourth rank, stand-

ing, and I wished I might have been in the front, kneeling, that my prayers would be more acceptable to God; for I was a sharp and wicked sinner when I was a young man, and in the square at Waterloo I made certain sure I would be before the Judgment Throne with every bullet I bit with my teeth or whiles I rammed it with my rammer-rod.

"Ou-ai, dree-four times they mighty an' enormous horses of war come down on us, an' dree-four times drew off an' come again; an' I was drenched an' dripping with blood from horses I put me bagganet to from under, and blood of men I forked from their saddles like trusses of hay at the thrashing.

"Ou-ai, 'twas where I lost my arm, at Waterloo. I mind him now, the mighty an' ferocious Frenchie that took my arm from me. I see him now. His horse could by no means fall for the bagganets that upheld him. An' he sat atop on his dead beast an' slashed most terrible all about him. An' he see me eye to eye, an' swings back his mighty sword till his arm to the elbow was over his shoulder, an', thinks I, 'I'll take thee with me, Frenchie, if so be my hour is now come.' An' I set my foot on the bodies before me, an' I ups an' gives him my bagganet straight to his throat; an' he comes swish with his sword, an' I goes ha! with my bagganet, an' a most terrible dizziness comes over me; an' I mind I said to one, 'Draw me from here'; an' a' bawls to me, 'Thou must die first, Zack'; which was the order of the day that every man in the square must die where a' stood an' move no foot till a' dropped dead."

Old Wirk paused and stared before him with bemused eyes as though he saw again those sights which in actual fact he had never seen; or as if, Sabre thought, watching him, some rift of his own individuality struck into the clouds of his fancies and held him puzzled. But he shook his head as though to shake it clear, and declared, "Ou-ai, that's how I lost my arm at the great ba'le of Waterloo-oo-oo."

One of the younger men, with a wink and a nod, called Sabre's attention to a bit of sport.

"Why, but, granfer, tha's got thy arms, both on un."

Old Wirk stared at his two hands, one on either knee before him, and raised and stared at one and then the other. His questioner tittered, and from others of the group were capacious "Haw-haws."

The old man turned on them sharply. "Tell 'ee I lost me arm at Waterloo-oo-oo. Tell 'ee I did!"

Sabre shook his head in reproof at the mockers, and pushed the ale-pot to Old Wirk's trembling hand. "Go on, Mr Wirk; go on. You're telling us about the ghost, about how Corporal Harry came home from Waterloo."

Old Wirk brightened and

wetted and gulped. "Ou-ai, ou-ai, when Corporal Harry come home from Waterloo. To be sure, to be sure, the terrible thing that it was for mortal eye to behold.

"Ou-ai, those were days; they surely were days. Us run for sojers, Corporal Harry an' me. Us run for sojers, we surely did. I mind me well the day the sojers come, an' round an' round the green they marched with drum an' colours an' a great mighty sergeant with a handful of favours that a' waves and shouts like the grandly man a' surely was. An' a' sings—

'With a rub-a-dub-dub,
An' a fol-lol-lol!'

an' all the children laughing an' jumping beside un; an' all the maids smiling and blushing; an' all the young men standing about main silly-looking an' twisting up their smocks in their hands.

"Ou-ai, dree times they go round the green with the drum an' colours; an' then they stand up here afore the inn an' the great an' mighty sergeant shouts, 'Now then, my likely lads, my likely lads! Now then, my true-born British likely lads, here's a pocket full o' shillings an' a knapsack full o' ribbons, an' who's the likely lads, the true-born British likely lads, that's going to have un?'

"Ou-ai, I see un now, that grandly man, here on this very spot, jingling his shillings an' a-shaking his ribbons; an' a goodwife cries out to un, 'Get away home, ye powerful an' wicked sojer men,' she calls out. 'There's no likely lads here for 'ee, an' no war here for likely lads to be murdered and shattered in. These be no fighting parts,' she tells un. 'Be off wi' ye, an' shame on 'ee.'

"That grandly man a-shakes his head an' rattles his shillings, an' smiles an' laughs, an', 'My likely lads, my likely lads,' says he, 'thy goodwife there would keep ye to tie to her skirts till ye be old women too. My likely lads, the King's a-calling for ye one an' all to catch Bonaparty, the scourge of Europe, an' who will stop to home when the King's a-calling him? Who'll wear a smock when a' can wear a fine red coat?'

"An' with that he sets off, and they all sets off, walking in a circle here, with the drum tapping an' the colours flying, an' that grandly man singing—

'With a rub-a-dub-dub,
An' a fol-lol-lol!'

an' giving a shilling an' pinning a favour here an' there to half a score on us. Right opposite me a' halts and cries, 'Now one for you, my likely lad. I warrant me the King's got the likeliest lad in all England here.'

"Ou-ai, so a' did say, to be sure, for I was a rare an' likely lad in those days, an' none in all the village to set beside me save only Corporal Harry, who was a lusty an' mighty one as ever woman come abed to in these parts. Ou-ai, a' certainly

was. But he was no corporal then, 'ee mind me, nor him nor me going for sojers then, having a most daring and terrible adventure to our hands which were to come to pass that very night; so that us stood away an' let the sojers an' the chaps go marching off while we shaped for it.

"You mind me, there was in the land in those days many a Frenchie that was gentle born in a's own country that was prisoner to us an' that lived with folks on parole, as they named it, which was his solemn word pledged on's sword that a' would not escape. One an' another I've see'd in they days, an' one there was a year an' more in the village here. A' was called Mouser, which is what they all are named in their own country, an' a' lived here with Mr Crawshaw at the white house yonder."

This roused Sabre. "Crawshaws" was the house he had just come to live in. "Crawshaw!" he exclaimed animatedly; "why, it's the house I've taken—the house I live in! 'Crawshaws' it's called; and that's the reason, eh? And a French officer lived there on parole in the Napoleonic days! By Jove, that's interesting! By Jove, fancy that! Go on, Mr Wirk; do go on."

"Ou-ai," nodded Old Wirk, in no way understanding Sabre's excitement, but thoroughly well pleased at having been the cause of it. "Ou-ai, 'twas there with Mr Crawshaw this Mouser lived; an' a' was a pleasant fair-spoken gentleman an' terrible polite. A' would take off a's hat to the lowliest woman; an' a' would buy sweeties for the children; an' a' would make paper boats for un on the pond; an' a' would set here on the bench with us an' laugh an' jabber a's parley-voo; an' a' would try drink pot o' ale an' screw up a's face like a man with vinegar in a's mouth, an' us ud laugh; to be sure how we did laugh to see un!

"A' could speak nobbut a word an' a word of English, an' no man understand un when a' did, an' 'twas long o' that that Harry an' me come to run for sojers. Harry saw a main deal o' this Mouser, for a' was courting Prudence that was wench in Mr Crawshaw's kitchen. An' a' tells me, Harry, that his was none the only courting at that house. Often as he be there, a' tells me, a' sees this Mouser walking the garden with Mr Crawshaw's lass, Mistress Anne. An' there come a day when a' says to me, 'Zack,' a' says, 'there's fifty guineas to be had for putting the Mouser over to Sandwich, by Dover, in Kent, to smugglers that wait to run un to France.'

"I says to un, 'Harry,' I says, ''tis a hanging job'; an' a' laughs an' says, 'Drabbit, man,' a' says, ''tis a fifty-guinea job, an' tho'llt have five-an'-twenty, Zack, an' I'll have five-an'-twenty an' my Prudence likewise, which the

lass'll marry me when we get the Mouser safe away.'

"I tell 'ee, chaps, I tell 'ee, sir, I were a rare un in those days, an' ready to chance my neck for any bit fun, leave alone a pocket of guineas, so I gives ear to un, an' a' tells me.

"A' tells me a rare tangle o' stuff. A' tells me a' was going to do this for Prudence, an' Prudence she be doing it for Mistress Anne, an' Mistress Anne she be doing it for the Mouser, an' the Mouser he be doing it for to see his mother that were dying; an' me, chaps, I did be going to do it for the adventure of it an' for the tidy pocket of guineas, an' because I always did what Harry did. Ou-ai, 'twas a rare tangle of reasons, it surely was.

"Me an' Harry we went over along to Mr Crawshaw's that night, an' in the garden we settled it all to rights, Harry an' me an' Mistress Anne an' Prudence an' the Mouser. The Mouser were a fine bold man, he surely were, an' a rare well-looking un. I mind me he had his arm about Mistress Anne while we talked, an' rare an' bravely he looked at her; an' rare an' sweet she looked at he with tears in her eyes while she asked Harry an' me to take care of un on the road an' see that no mortal ill befell him.

"Mouser's trouble, ye see, chaps, was that a' could speak no English, which was why he surely could not travel the roads alone; an' Mistress Anne she made it for us that, when we meet folk on the road, Harry an' me'd be two young chaps taking to Dover a gentleman that was deaf mute from his cradle an' no could talk an' no could hear; an' 'twas so arranged, an' on a fine clear evening we set out, the dree on us, a hunner an' fifty miles an' all, an' us in reckoning to meet the smugglers on the tenth day forward—twenty mile a day and two-dree days to spare.

"Us were gay an' lively company for all the Mouser could not speak to be understood. We were young chaps an' mighty lusty an' free, an' it surely is good to be young an' never a fear an' only a laugh for all that betides, come ill, come good. Us was like, as it were, taking a holiday: the Mouser setting for his home; an' Harry an' me, that had lived long years on the Green, seeing new sights such as are only once new to a man, an' never the like again.

"Ou-ai, an' what sights there were, to be sure. Why, a strong an' lively young man might walk the roads in these quiet an' peaceable times an' see nary a single strange thing to set un staring. I tell 'ee 'twas no such in they tearing days. I tell 'ee, chaps, I tell 'ee, sir, we see with our own eyes a man with a bear and a monkey to set to dance like mortal folk; an' in one village us watched a play with puppets that was called 'The Sad Husband,' an' that was most wonderful to see; an' there'd be

folks travelling post with four horses an' all laid out at a stretch; an' there'd be a rich lord an's lady travelling in fine coach with cock horse behind for to take un up hills; an' there'd be sober an' respectful gentlemen on a good horse with lady on pillion behind un; an' there'd be trade folk with pack-horse, with rare fine stuffs on un, I warrant me; an' there'd be a chap jog by on a nag, an' presently us overtake nag tied to post, an' presently soon another chap jog by us on same nag, which was a common mode of travel in they days for two with one horse between un, travelling 'ride an' tie,' as 'twas called. An' once us see at an inn where us bided the night two stern an' sour men that were Bow Street runners, Robin redbreasts, as they called un, that were pursuing some evil breaker of the law. Ou-ai, a rare fright they give us, us thinking they was after we. But they surely were not; an' while at first we were main cautious and fearful of all we met, we come bolder as the days run on an' none take no notice on us nor ask no questions.

"Ou-ai, right down into Kent we come, with never a slip nor hurt by the way; an' then the luck turn against us an' mischances come like water through a leakin' roof which 'ee stop one place an' a' starts in t'other.

"Two-score mile or more from Sandwich, by Dover, an' dree days from the night of meeting the smugglers, we come by an inn at nightfall an' made to pass the night there, an' stepped into kitchen an' found much company assembled an' mighty ungracious. Was a fine lady there an' a fine gentleman, with a wheel off their chaise, an' made to stop for the night along of it, an' mighty ill-pleased to tarry in such a place; an' two fine young officers bound for Dover making company with them, an' they four desiring all the inn to themselves, an' looking at any that chanced in as so much dirt that must keep to one end an' sit there mum.

"Ou-ai, when we made entry, all dripping, for 'twas raining amain, 'La!' cries the fine lady, 'here be three more of the wretches. Why, this inn doth collect the raff of the roads like bugs in a straw-bed. 'Tis monstrous unpleasant, and do but see how the stinking steam rises off their clothes! Is there no stable for such but they must press in where quality is?'

"With that she puts a bottle to her nose an' smells at it, an' her fine lord puts glass to his eye an' stares at us, an' the fine young officers put also bottles to their noses an' stare, an' the company beside the fire that likely had been talked to thus, each in's turn, looked mighty sour upon us, which was to make favour with the fine folk, 'ee understand, an' show they had no lot nor part with such as we.

"Us made to take stools

quiet by the fire, never liking, 'ee mind me, to call folks' regard to ourselves; but whiles we ate of our vittles the quality folk must chatter on idle tongues at us, the common company sniggering to hear it, an' us mighty disturbed an' uncomfortable, I do assure 'ee.

"'This Mouser, 'ee mind me, was dressed like sober an' decent gentleman, an' carried short sword by's side; an' the fine lady with her eye on un, 'Him wear a laced waistcoat,' she cries. 'La, 'tis monstrous strange to wear a laced waistcoat an' carry sword an' be keeping company with such! What manner of gentleman can that be that does so?'

"'Has a hang-dog look,' says her lord, quizzing the Mouser through his glass.

"''Fore George,' says one of the officers, 'has a nasty French look, or I never see a Frenchman that have run two-score through the body,' a' says.

"I tell 'ee, sir, I tell 'ee, chaps, I began to be sore afraid with this manner of talk, an' I put my elbow into Corporal Harry's side for him to say summat that could speak to quality more mannerly an' bold than ever the like o' me.

"Corporal Harry touches his lock in a well-behaved, sober, modest way, an' a' says, 'Thy pardon, madam,' a' says, 'thy pardon, sirs, the gentleman is no French but true-born English, an's father is man of property an' good estate beyond Dover. An' by thy kind leave, lady, an' by the most terrible affliction of God, a's born deaf-mute an' neither speaks nor yet hears, an' be come from Bath where a most notable physician has seen un, an' be travelling now to a's father's estate—in our company an' protection, an't please thee.'

"Ou-ai, a' could speak properly, Corporal Harry could, remembering all that Mistress Anne had told un to say, an' saying it most bold an' convincing. But it surely was of no avail with they. 'A fine tale,' cried the lady. 'Keep it where 'tis asked of thee,' she cries. 'Speaking to thy betters! La!' cries she to the officers, ''tis a nice thing that I should be spoken up to my face by any dirt that pleases!'

"Her lord, that likely was accustomed to her such-like whimseys, laughs; but one o' the young officers takes up with her. 'Will have the room cleared for 'ee, madam,' a' says to her, 'if it likes 'ee, madam,' a' says. 'But sound the precious mute if he be mute to French or to English only,' a' says. 'Try him with thy French, madam,' a' says.

"'Ee mind me, chaps, 'ee mind me, sir, the Mouser could understand no word of this that they was saying, an' for same cause I could no warn un; an' whiles I broke out a most cruel sweat all hot an' cold in all parts of my body, an' whiles I see by Corporal Harry's face that a' was suffering the same, the lady in a very

quick an' sharp voice cries out some jabber of most foreign an' outlandish language; an' every man's eye was on the Mouser watching him, an' to my most terrible horror an' fear a' starts up a's head as though a' was stung, an' a' flushes in the face red as a maid that have had a rude immodest word spoken to her.

"Ou-ai, it surely was a clever cunning trap as ever I did behold, an' that Mouser fair caught in un, an' Corporal Harry an' me fair caught along on un, an' all jumps to their feet an' shouts; an' I tell 'ee, chaps, I see plain before my eyes the most terrible an' alarming spectacle of myself hanging from gibbet for escaping a Frenchie like once had seen the body of a most lawless an' dangerous man swinging over to Chovensbury cross-roads.

"Ou-ai, they all jump to their feet, one an' all, quality an' common company alike; an' the young officer hollers out, 'Fore George,' a' hollers, 'a villain Frenchman as well I knew the minute I set eyes on un,' a' hollers. An' a' tugs out a's sword; an' the fine lady spits out some more French language; an' that Mouser, like as if it was some most terrible insult, goes red as turkey cock an' fires back some most fierce an' hissing language, an' the lady screams; an', 'Oh, the horrible villain!' she calls out. 'Oh, the disgusting French villain!' an' the officer comes at un with a's sword; an' the Mouser pulls out sword to un; an' one ups with a stool an' cracks un on head from behind; an' down a' goes crash; an' another catches my boots from beneath me an' down I goes on top of un; an' another runs in on Corporal Harry, an' Corporal Harry ups stool an' lends un a flick that splits skull for un; an' a' swings stool, Corporal Harry does, an' there surely never was such hard an' terrible battle in peaceable inn afore. Ou-ai, 'twas most terrible to behold an' to hear, with shouting and most blasphemous oaths, an' the lady screaming, an' the young officers trying to run Harry through with swords an' no able to get near un for the press. Ou-ai, 'twas certainly most terrible to behold; but they was too many for Corporal Harry, lookee, and very soon a' was down an' a dozen upon un, an' soon all dree on us trussed with stout ropes an' pitched in stable.

"Ou-ai, there we surely were, the dree on us, in most sad an' alarming situation as ever mortal man could surely be in. I tell 'ee, chaps, I tell 'ee, sir, I lay there in the dark most forlornly aching in every limb of my body where I'd been treaded on an' battered whiles I lay on the floor; an' I lay there most dismally beholding my poor sinful body swinging on gibbet, an' with all the glory departed out of our adventure, that I had took up with so merry a heart, an' wishing

most solemnly an' painfully that I never had started upon un, but had stayed home to Penny Green, content with my lot an' portion like any sober an' proper young man should.

"Ou-ai, I were most sore amazed an' fearful; an' presently I says, 'Harry,' I says, 'we be in most sorrowful an' mortal plight,' I says to un; 'an' we best be preparing to meet our God,' I says; which, lookee, chaps, they'd hollered at us when they chuck us in stable that, come morning, the young officers would swear to us before magistrate at Dover an' have warrant out and officers of the law sent over for to fetch us to prison to trial an' execution.

"Corporal Harry give a laugh, an' I tell 'ee, chaps, 'twas no rueful laugh as 'ee might expect that a' gave, but a bold and merry laugh, for a' was ever a bold an' merry un, come lot, come scot; an' a' says, 'Zack,' a' says, 'tha can prepare to meet thy God, an't please thee, but first must prepare to get out from here; for I tell 'ee, Zack, 'ee can make collar for horse, but that's no putting a's head in un; an' they can make rope collar for me, but I surely am not going to wait here for to be fitted with un. I've my hands nigh free,' a' says, 'an' in nobbut a minute I'll free thine, an' us'll see if there be no way from here but the door,' a' says; 'which I see a crack in roof as I lie here on my back,' a' says, 'an' where there's a small crack there's way for a bigger,' a' says.

"Ay, marry, a' was a bold un, Corporal Harry. A' was presently searching round in dark on hands an' knees, an' a' found a billhook, an' in twodree minutes a' cut my bonds, an' I cut his'n; an' we cut free the Mouser that was groaning sore with crack on's head, but come to brave an' lively when we free un an' rouse un an' show un by pointing to broken rafters in roof what we would be after; an' presently soon Corporal Harry that was biggest stands straggle-leg beneath crack in roof, an' I climbs on's shoulders, an' the Mouser, that were a light an' nimble one, a' climbs on mine, an' a' takes billhook an' a' cuts away rafters that were rotten like cutting cheese, an' a' lays hold of beam, an' a' gives jump an' kick, an' a' sends Corporal Harry an' me sprawling, but a' clambers up, an' 'twas no very hard work for me off of Harry's shoulders to follow un.

"Ou-ai, there was Mouser an' me out on roof; an' we reach down my jacket an' Corporal Harry fastens on to un, an' a' kicks an' wriggles, an' we hold on amain like our arms ud come out their sockets, an' presently soon a' catches my wrists an' the Mouser lays hold of a's hair, an' a' squeals an' cries, 'Drabbit, Zack,' a' cries, 'make un leave go of my hair or a' surely will pull scalp off top of my head.' An' I chokes a laugh out of me,

pulling at un, an' I says, 'Better the scalp off tha head than tha head off tha body on gibbet,' I says; an' presently soon we pull un so a' gets a's arm through roof, an' a' swings a's self up, an' there we be, the dree on us, up on main top of roof, an' it surely do make me dizzy to think of our most fearsome an' perilous plight, right up in the sky an' mortal dark all round, an' no man to know how we should slip down pitch of roof, nor how then get to ground, nor what like manner of ground awaited for us to get down to.

"How us should ha settled un I surely do not know, but, whiles we sat to think on un, that Mouser somehow slips, an' a' gives a screech an' away a' goes, an' there comes a rattle of tiles an' another screech, an' then a most mighty an' alarming thud, an' then language that was wicked oaths, sure enough, though in the French language, an' not to be understood.

"Us no could help laughing, Harry an' me, all terrible an' alarming as our situation was, an' then Harry says, 'If a' can swear a' can live,' a' says; 'an' where a Mouser can go I'm main sure I can follow,' a' says; 'so here goes, Zack,' a' says, an' a' pushes the ridge of roof with a's hands—a' was laying sprawled out on's belly, 'ee mind me—an' away a' goes, slithering; an' there comes to me presently a breaking and then a thud, an' then most sinful an' blasphemous oaths, which 'ee might fairly call the good English of the same words the Mouser had said.

"I tell 'ee, chaps, I tell 'ee, sir, I had main little stomach for the terrible danger of casting myself lose an' following un; but there surely was less stomach in me for stopping where I be'd, what with the noise they two had made by their falling and their oaths, an' the mortal fear that was upon me of being taken to gibbet to hang by neck.

"Wherefore I prayed a most solemn prayer that I should not break my neck nor hang by un neither, an' I let myself go with my hands, and down I slipped, tearing my stomach most cruel and painful; and I goes quick an' quicker, and whizz! I goes over edge, an' down I comes crash an' splash into most evil an' terrible muck-heap which my face buried in, an' which was what caused they other two to make the oaths they had sworn, an' would have me—for, God forgive me! chaps, I had no found religion in those days; but, 'ee mind me, I was that rare thankful not to have broke my neck nor no bones that my heart was filled more with praise than with blasphemy, as I do hope will be remembered for me when I come to face the awful Day of Judgment.

"Ou-ai, I surely were thankful to think I were free with no harm done, for all I were soused and fair stinking with that muck-heap; ou-ai, 'twas

thankful I was; but 'ee can think, chaps, 'ee can think, sir, the great fright that descended upon me, an' upon they, at the very same instant; for I had done no more than raise me up when a window of the inn just beside of us was throwed up an' the voice of that fine lady shrieks with a most alarming and blood-curdling shriek. 'Murder!' she shrieks. 'Thieves, fire, murder, villains!' she shrieks. 'Tis they dree villains escaping!' she shrieks. 'Come to un, come to un, come to un!'

"With that comes shouts an' runnings an' bangings, an' all together such a terrible an' alarming din as ears surely never did hear before. An' Harry an' me an' that Mouser we run one way, an' men come pouring up out of the ground, as you might believe, in front of us; an' we turn an' runs t'other way, an' more men be there; an' up in a window some one calls out, 'Stand in the King's name!' but I was that terrified an' bewildered, running this way an' running that, that I would not ha' stood in the devil's name; an' he that had shouted then fires great blunderbus from window, an' bullets fly all round, an' some one lets out a screech, an' I runs into one man in's shirt an' trousers, an' I hits un a flick an' down a' goes; an' I hears Harry shouting, 'This way, Zack, this way, Zack!' and I sets for un, an another man jumps up at me an' I goes for to flick un an' a' lets out a jabber, so I knowed un for Mouser, an' I takes his hand an' we run by wall an' over gate an' finds us on road, an' runs like all the powers of darkness was behind us; an' we come up with Harry an' all dree of us run; an' where we was to in the darkness I by no means could say; but the shouting back of us was soon not to be heard, an' us throws ourselves down an' pants an' sweats like, 'ee might think, our lungs was bursting, which surely was how mine did feel."

Old Wirk had been reciting these passages relative to the escape from the inn with an animation in keeping with the scurrying hurly-burly of its action; now, as he came to the throwing of themselves down in exhaustion, so by exhaustion his narrative seemed to cease. His flow stopped; his jaws and lips and tongue churned vigorously, but churned silently; once, staring upon his listeners with his bright blue eyes, which appeared, however, to be regarding scenes much more remote, he said, "Ou-ai, 'twas a night of sore peril, a most perilous night it surely was," then the silent churning again—the apparent, and highly unsatisfactory, end.

Chuckles at the blank surprise in Sabre's face rose from those seated about. One man took pity. "Well, but that ain't end, granfer," he called.

"Tell 'ee," said Old Wirk sharply, "tell 'ee that's how us run for sojers, Corporal Harry an' me."

"Gen'leman wants to hear end, granfer."

"Tell 'ee that's how us run for sojers. Tell 'ee that's how 'twas."

There came to Sabre the sudden wit to jump the aged man over the obvious hiatus. He lent forward and put his tobacco-pouch on the lap of Old Wirk's smock. "I see, I see, Mr Wirk. That's a splendid story. I see. There was such a search and an outcry after you when you'd got away that you and Harry went for soldiers somewhere near by as the best way of keeping hid. Of course you did."

"Surely, surely," said the aged man, and filled his pipe with trembling old fingers.

"At Dover?"

"Nay, nay, nary Dover, sir. Us durst not show to Dover. Ramsgate. At Ramsgate 'twas that Harry an' me went for sojers. Ou-ai, all horses an' sojers an' powerful enormous cannons an' ships was at Ramsgate for the great army going for to sail to Portugal, which was the Peninsular, as they come to call un."

A ravishment of interest thrilled Sabre. He was fairly well up in the history of the Napoleonic wars. Astounding to meet in the flesh one who, as it were, had fought in the Peninsular campaign! The old man had no more fought in those battles than he had; but the trick of his failed brain caused him to produce stories of them precisely as if he were the ghost of that grandsire of his come out of that stirring past whose history his musket had helped to shape. It thrilled Sabre. He told himself, "That's what he is! When he's like this he's not Old Wirk of to-day. He's just the spirit of his grandfather. By Jove, I'm talking to a chap who perhaps fought at Almeida, at Ciudad Rodrigo, at Albuera, who perhaps was with Moore at Corunna! Think of it!"

He addressed Old Wirk aloud. "At Ramsgate of course it was, Mr Wirk. That's where General — I've forgotten his name—some General or other sailed with a brigade for Portugal to join Wellington, who'd gone from Cork. You went with him, eh? You and Corporal Harry. A great army of you, eh? Scores of ships weren't there?"

"Ou-ai," said Old Wirk, "ou-ai, a power of ships there surely was." He nodded and silently churned, and silently churned and nodded. He said, "Ou-ai, they ships! 'Twas terrible. Ah, terrible surely 'twas. One day we was all floating together like flock of ducks on a pond, and next day all scattered an' gone, an' us tossing in most terrible storm, an' many days tossing, an' terribly drove by most cruel storm, an' drove on to rocks an' shipwrecked, an' not above a score on us rescued to land which were by Portland in Dorsetsheer."

Sabre stared, puzzled, and then realised another hiatus in the drifting narrative and a hiatus much more vexing. The various expeditions to Portugal, that from Ramsgate in-

cluded, had reached the seat of war in safety. It was after Sir John Moore's glorious retreat to Corunna that storm had caught the homeward transports, and strewn them, with their war-worn burthens, all along the Channel coast from Land's End to Dover. Old Wirk's grandfather *had* been at Corunna then, and annoying Old Wirk had jumped the whole campaign and straddled right across to its termination! Disappointing, disappointing! Sabre tried coaxingly to return the aged mind to the shores of the Peninsula, but Old Wirk only churned, and developed not the smallest response to stimulus. Younger men sitting about laughed, and shortly began to move away: "He'll no' but talk when he's a mind to, sir." Veteran sires of the village who remained drew apart into their own gossip. Sabre, alone with Old Wirk, tried him this way and tried him that; and suddenly the thread was taken up again—an interval of years between the dropped end and the end resumed, but still. . . .

"But the ghost that haunts the Green, Mr Wirk," Sabre had said in desperation of final appeal. "That was what you were telling me, you know. You've got up to how you and Harry went for soldiers, and then how you fought in the Peninsular; but Waterloo was quite some years later, and you said the ghost came after that; you said the Green's been haunted ever since Corporal Harry came back from Waterloo. The ghost of Willie—Willie Pringle. Now, do tell me, Mr Wirk. After Waterloo—do tell me that."

"Tell 'ee I fot at Waterloo-oo-oo," announced Mr Wirk suddenly and querulously.

"Of course you did. Of course you did. I know you did. And you were in the square, and Corporal Harry shouted, 'Here they be coming, Zack,' and down on you they thundered."

The spring was touched. "Ou-ai," said Old Wirk. "Ou-ai, they Frenchies thundering on their great enormous horses of war an' waving their great enormous swords——"

"But if he goes over it all again," thought Sabre, "we shall just come back to the same place," and he boldly interrupted. "Yes, well then, when Corporal Harry came back after Waterloo. How did he come back, Mr Wirk?"

"He come back a blind man," said Mr Wirk.

Dramatic effect! Enticing possibilities! "Blind!" cried Sabre keenly. "He was blinded in the fighting, eh? And came back with you? You brought him back?"

Old Wirk shook his head. "Nay, nay. I was nigh a twelvemonth returned afore Corporal Harry came back. Nigh a twelvemonth, an' had set my mind to it that he had bin killed, when a' suddenly comes, walking up the green here as sudden as if he had sprung out of it. Ay, marry, and in nobbut two-dree hours walking off again, blind as a'

was, an' none that knew un never set eye on un again that day to this."

"But that was strange, Mr Wirk, going off so soon like that. Why? What happened? Did something happen to make him go again at once?"

"Ou-ai," said Old Wirk. "Ou-ai, sommat surely did happen, an' the most terrible thing that ever mortal eye did behold. Lookee, sir, 'twas a fair day on the Green here, the day that Corporal Harry come back. There was tents an' booths an' giddy-go-round horses an' shooting galleries, an' all sorts of most wonderful an' most merry sights for to see. And there was maypole an' lads an' lassies dancing round un, an' all merry an' beautiful as ever a holiday could be. An' while I stood watching the dancers, one says to me, 'Look, Zack,' a' says, 'what strange man be yon that comes this way?' An' I looks, an' one an' another looks, an' presently all be looking, an' a' comes on straight into the middle of us, the strange figure that us see. A' was dressed in a sojer's coat, an' a' was smart an' trim an' pretty to look upon; an' a' whistled an' sung an' laughed as a' walked, an' a' carried in's hand a long sword that was like streak of lightning with the sun that dazed upon un, an' was like brand of fire where a' held un, for that the handle was of beaten gold an' most beautiful to see.

"An' as a' comes, whistling an' singing, a' sometimes stops an' throws aloft the sword high, high till it was no but a shining star in the sky; an' a' holds up a's hand as though a' called to it, an' down like a lightning-flash it comes, an' the maids scream to see it rushing upon un, an' a' catches it in a's hand safe an' sure as a bird to it's nest, an' a' twirls it round like a ring of fire, an' a' laughs an' throws an' catches an' twirls un again. An' while we stand an' stare a' calls out, 'Hey, my lassies,' a' calls out. 'Hey, my lassies; hey, my lads. Doth none know me? Doth none know me? I be come back from the wars to my home an' for my bride; an' I know my home, an' I know my sweet bride, an' I know 'ee all, lads an' lassies, though I no can see home nor bride nor none of 'ee; but by the like of it none knows me. Is old Zack not there that a' doth not know me?' a' says.

"An' I knew un then, for all a' looked so strange. An' a' calls out 'Harry!' to un, an' goes to un, an' one an' another that remembered un; for all a' had not bin to village for long years an' had growed uncommon, one an' another calls out, 'Why, 'tis Harry!' an' flocks about un; an' a' laughs an' banters, an' a' tells us a's blind, an' a' says that though he no can see his pretty bride he's come for to fetch her; an' he asks, 'Where be she, then, my jolly playmates? Where be my sweetheart, my true love, my Prudence?'

"Ou-ai, a' asked 'em that; an' they look one upon another

an' say no word; an' they look upon me as saying 'twas me should tell un; an' they draw off an' leave us an go back to their junketings; an' I says to un, 'Harry,' I says, 'thy maid Prudence be dead an' laid in churchyard.'

"An' a' says to me, 'Zack,' a' says, 'was she maid or mother when they laid her there?'

"An' I tells un, 'Mother.'

"An' a' says to me, 'Zack,' a' says, 'was she wife or widow?'

"An' I tells un, 'Nay, Harry, nor wife nor widow were the lass.'

"An' a' says to me, 'Zack,' a' says, 'died she in her bed as a lass dies?'

"An' I tells un, 'Nary bed, Zack; in the stream by Puncher's farm they found her.'

"An' a' says to me, 'Zack,' a' says, 'tis all gospel true, then, what the lass wrote in letter to me, an' what I heard from one by camp-fire when us fot the Frenchies, Zack, an' what I heard from one in Tidborough town dree nights ago?'

"An' I tells un, 'Mortal true, Harry.'

"An' a' says to me, 'Zack,' a' says, 'twas Willie Pringle wronged the lass? 'Twas Willie Pringle took from me my bride, my pretty sweetheart, my pretty Prudence?'

"An' I tells un, 'Harry, 'twas.'

"An' a' says to me, 'Zack,' a' says, 'tell me, now, be Willie Pringle here on Green while Prudence lies in churchyard?'

"An' I looks with my eyes to maypole an' I tells un, 'Harry, ay.'

"An' a' says to me, 'Zack,' a' says, 'be Willie Pringle sporting an' laughing with the lassies an' lads while Prudence lies very cold in churchyard?'

"An' I tells un, 'Harry, ay.'

"A' turns to me, sir, an' a' says, 'Lead me down to un, Zack. Lead me right down to un. I lief would sport an' play with Willie Pringle.'

"Now lookee, sir, an' listen, for this is how 'twas. Harry among the lads an' lassies calls to un an' says to un, 'My lads an' lassies, my fond and friendly playmates,' a' says, 'stand about me an' hark to me an' fine sport for the fair I'll give 'ee. Many fairs an' many inns I've made sport for in the Frenchies' land an' all along roads from here to Dover. I can sport with a sword like blind man never sported yet—nay, nor yet man with eye in's head. See, lads an' lassies all, 'tis a gentleman's sword, a nobleman's sword, a prince's sword. From dead Frenchy I took un on field of Waterloo, an' see the hilt of gleaming gold with jewels, an' see the blade of true Damascus steel, lithe as a serpent, strong as an oak-tree, quick as an adder's tongue, true as a lover to his lass. My lads an' lassies, when I should ha' come home to my true love after the great battle of Waterloo, I fell in with lively ones at the great city of Brussels, an' one was a swordsman that could do mighty wonders with a sword. Him

an' me, when our money was gone, made company together. A' was a Prooshan, an' one of they that come to us at Waterloo. A' larned me sword-play, an' I were quick to learn an' soon as good as he. Us pleased the folk same like as I now will please ye. But a' was a sorry villain, that Prooshan was. A' growed jealous o' me, an' us quarrelled, an' I beat un sore. A' swore vengeance on me, an' one night, in drink, a' came at me an' throwed that at me that blinded me; an' I caught un before a' could run, an' I ran sword through's body. My lassies an' lads, though blind I was, an' though blind I be, I still could do my sword-play an' still can do un yet. For lookee, lads an' lassies, my part in our sword-play was done blindfold, an' that which a' had learned me to do with cloth about my eyes, same as ever could I do with the darkness ever upon me. Ye shall see; ye shall see. Ring round me, lads an' lassies, an' see sword-play such as never ye see afore.'

"All on us we ringed round un, sir, an' true it is never afore were such play seen with a sword. A' whirled his sword, an' a' twisted his sword, an' a' cut with his sword, an' thrust with his sword, till 'ee would ha' said the man stood within a maze of hoops of shining silver. Ou-ai, ou-ai, most marvellous it was to behold, to be sure. An' when a' was done with that a' called for ribbons an' a' called for apples, an' a' throwed un aloft an' cut un as they fell in manner most astonishing to see. An' when a' was done with that a' called for bold uns to set apple on throat an' a' would sever un in halves, all blind as a' was, an' make never so much as a scratch on the throat that had the apple on un. We was main afeared at first for to let un try, but a' laughed so bold an' so mocking that first me an' then another an' then another come forward an' leaned us back on soles of our feet an' palms of our hands an' stretched back our necks an' had apple cut in twain on un.

"Ou-ai, 'twas wonderful, 'twas wonderful. Up 'ud go his sword high as a' could reach, an' down swift as a' could hit; an' all us 'ud hold our breaths for fear, an' the lassies scream, an' lo, there was the apple in twain on grass, an' he whose throat it had bin on laughing an' proud to ha' shown his courage. There was many hung back afeared till for shame of the lassies' eyes, an' for mocking of those that had come forward, they come out an' took their turn. An', lookee, sir, each one that came Corporal Harry would cry, 'Who be this?' an' us ud shout, 'Benjy Willcomequick,' or whosoever it might be; an' Corporal Harry would raise his sword an' say, 'A good stroke, then, for Benjy Willcomequick, an' a true stroke for un!' an' down his sword would come—swoo-oo-oop. Drab take these teeth o' mine.

"So it went on, sir. An' presently Harry says, 'Lo,'

says he, 'all that I knew here an' that were playmates with me ha' come, but there be one that has not come, an' one I fain would come, for well I knew un an' many's the honest fun we've had together. 'Tis Willie Pringle I mean. Is he not here?'

"An' the lads an' lassies laugh an' cry, 'He is here, Harry; he is here.'

"An' he cries, 'Ha! Right glad I am he be here. Good welcome to 'ee, Willie Pringle. Come forward, come forward. Show thou be'st not afeared of me, Willie Pringle. What cause hast thou to fear me, man?'

"Sir, they all turn to Willie Pringle for to pull un forward; an' Willie Pringle hung back an' said a' felt ill an' that the sun had bin too strong for un. A' hung back, an' truly ill a' looked, an' ghastly white, and the sweat running like water down his face. But they laughed at un an' called to un, an' for shame a' could not tarry, an' they pushed un forward, an' into the ring he comes, an' sets down on feet an' hands an' stretches out his throat, an' Harry, with never a word, puts apple on un.

"Ou-ai, but sick an' ghastly Willie Pringle looked, an' the sweat streaming down his face, an' him so shaking that twice the apple rolled from's throat an' fell, an' us shouts to Harry 'twas fallen, an' with never a word but only a smile Harry feels for apple on the grass an' sets it back again.

"Then all be fixed at last, an' Harry puts his sword aloft, an' says he, as he had said for t'others, 'Who be this?' an' they cry to un, 'Willie Pringle.' An' a' says, 'A good stroke, then, for Willie Pringle an' a true stroke for un!'

"An' a change comes in's voice, an' a' says in a loud crying voice, 'Untruly thou hast dealt by a maid, Willie Pringle, but truly will I deal with thee. Untruly thou hast robbed a maid of her virtue, an' untruly me of my love, but truly will I deal with thee.'

"An' a' takes his sword up higher yet. An' a most terrible silence an' a most terrible fear falls on all the company; an' I see man clutching man an' maid clutching maid; an' all would cry an' run to stop un, but none could move, so terrible did he look; an' I thought to see Willie Pringle twist an' roll away, but a' was fixed there as though was bound with iron bands, an' his eyes staring an' the sweat like water on un.

"An' Harry in a most terrible voice says, 'Untruly thou hast taken a life, Willie Pringle, but truly a life thou shalt give.'

"An' a' cries in a very loud voice, 'Ha!' an' down his sword come like lightning from above, an' through apple an' through throat an' through neck it goes, an' the head falls an' rolls; an' in the mist before my een, an' in the horror an' the dismay an' the confusion, I see Harry wipe his blade on grass an' sheath his sword an' pass through the press an' walk away, none having wits nor courage to stop un."

THE RED DUSTER.

BY MARTIN PUICH.

I. TUGS.

My lady goes a-dancing in a vision of brocade,
But she wouldn't look so fetching if it wasn't for her maid.
My lady's tired of dancing, and her smile is wearing thin,
And she's jolly glad the maid is waiting up to tuck her in.

We saw her when she slipped the way—
The sea that kissed her stately bow—
We fussed around her where she lay.
(She's got a bit more haughty now.)
We took her gently by the hand
And berthed her, tidy, trim, and snug—
A perfect liner, nobly planned,
But nodding grateful to the tug,
The sooty, smoky, smelly tug.

She's made a dozen record trips;
(She don't care how much coal she burns)
And what her steward takes in tips
Is ten times what our skipper earns.
Her officers are brass-bound nobs.
Her chart-room sports a Persian rug.
But when it comes to tricky jobs
Why, "Where the Hell's that ruddy tug—
That frousy, blousy, lousy tug?"

She drops her bags of Royal Mails
On many a palm-strewn, pearly beach.
She sees the dolphins and the whales.
Our farthest trip is Limehouse Reach.
Her skipper smokes a fat cigar.
Our skipper smokes a pipe of plug.
But when the dock-gate swings ajar
She has to leave it to the tug,
The huffy, puffy, stuffy tug.

II. LONDON DOCKS.

When Sheba's Queen to Solomon
  Brought spicy riddles framed in gold
She sat beside him on his throne
  While he their wealth and answer told.
We bring more gifts than Sheba knew
  To London, Queen of all the Seas.
She answers, "Pay your customs due—
  And use the tradesmen's entrance, please."

From Volga, Amazon, and Tyne,
  From Southern Seas where coral rocks
Like sapphire set in silver shine;
  From where the wild Atlantic mocks
The sombre, ice-bound Barrier line,
  We bring our spoil to London's Docks.

She greets us with no pageantry;
  For us no brazen welcome rings.
Our derricks drop along the quay
  The ransom of a thousand kings;
And here is all our Odyssey:
  "I s'pose you see some funny things?"

Yet there are tales the Captains tell
  When 'baccy smoke is burning blue
(And echoes of the Channel swell
  Set us a-nod, a-gossip too),
Of things that ne'er to Drake befell,
  Of shores Columbus never knew.

The word that from the Sage's lip
  The Scribe took down an age ago
Stands fast. The sea-way of a ship
  Is still beyond our ken to know.
Homer! Could you but make the trip
  From Chittagong to Callao!

The 'prentice boy who sits to wrest
  His ticket from the Board of Trade
Has still a-burning in his breast
  The fire that round old Cadiz played.
His workmanship still stands the test
  Who Frobisher and Cabot made.

In ice-bound gulf and Northern fog,
  Where summer suns shine pale and sad;
Beneath the Lion and the Dog
  Still sail the men that Jason had.
You still may gather from the log
  The stuff to make an Iliad.

III. MY SHIP.

Before I left the Firth of Tay
  To sail upon my maiden trip
I made my boyish vow, "One day
  I will be Master of a ship."

My mother watched me sail away
  With tear-dimmed eye and trembling lip;
But proudly smiled to hear me say,
  "I will be Master of a ship."

Our canvas set in bright array,
  She watched us to th' horizon's dip.
While I was conning spar and stay
  She prayed for me—and for my ship.

The knotted ropes that weal and flay,
  The Captain's heavy-handed clip,
Were part and parcel of my pay
  As 'prentice-boy aboard a ship.

When half an instant of delay
  Meant present curse and future whip,
I stood a-tiptoe to obey
  And liked the job—and loved the ship.

Half-blind with the Atlantic spray
  That froze upon the foremast tip,
I found it is no schoolboy's play
  To be a 'prentice in a ship.

In foreign harbours where we lay
  Forbidden fruits I learnt to sip.
What damozel could answer "Nay"
  To such a boy, from such a ship?

But if ashore I wandered fey,
  Afloat, the wheel within my grip,
Not Circe could have turned astray
  My eye, my compass, or my ship.

My time was up. Serene and gay,
A keen-eyed, curly-haired young rip,
I sat at Plymouth to essay
To pass for mate aboard a ship.

My mother was a thought more grey,
But oh! so eager to equip
With tender care and proud display
Her son, as mate aboard a ship.

Beneath the Tropics' searching ray—
In fogs that soak you till you drip—
From Mucking Flats to Mandalay
I kept my watches in my ship.

I've steered some tricky courses? Aye.
It wanted but a little slip,
One reckoning a thought agley,
And I'd have gone down with my ship.

Our Captain died at Olahleh.
Shot fore and aft, we watched him dip—
Feared from the Barrier to the Bay—
And I—and I brought home the ship.

They might have passed me over. They
Are used a name or two to skip;
And I'd a heart as cold as clay
For fear I would not get the ship.

But Plymouth sent a "D.Z.A."[1]
"Pack up your wallet and your scrip.
Next time you load, next time you weigh,
'Twill be as Master of your ship."

My mother's sleeping by the brae,
But on my bridge or in my kip
(It's fallen as she used to pray)
She sees me, Master of my ship.

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[1] International Code—"Allow me to congratulate you."

THE IRRECONCILABLES.

AMONG the many embittered controversies that rage to-day, there are few which arouse more impassioned outbursts of feeling from their opponents and champions than the question of the re-establishment of the Jew in Palestine. It is indeed a many-sided problem. To the idealist Jew it appears as the fulfilment of a prophetic vision; to the half-educated Jew of provincial Europe it is sometimes a fiery ideal, but more often the most expedient way of escape from persecution, oppression, want, and unemployment. To another and more dangerous class of the same race, the political fanatic of criminal tendencies, it seems at once a refuge and an opportunity—a refuge from the vigilant secret police of Europe, and an opportunity for the dissemination of those enlightening political doctrines which shall set up in this much-harassed corner of Asia that strange contradiction in terms, the ideal anarchic State. But this by no means exhausts the aspects of the case. To the British Government it involves presumably a pledge whose repudiation would mean a most unbecoming lowering of imperial dignity, and whose fulfilment, though fraught with difficulties, yet holds out the hope of considerable commercial expansion.

There is still another point of view to be considered, and one that is of paramount importance—namely, the Arab one.

There is a small minority here which sees in the Zionist invasion a slender enough possibility of gain: the Arab is poor, the Jew is rich, and it is from the Jew alone that money is ever likely to be forthcoming for that development of the country which may benefit the Arab as well as the Jew. But the great bulk of Arab opinion takes an entirely different view, and a completely single-minded one. The Arab is a born enemy of the Jew in race and religion, and he resents Jewish domination on every ground with all the strength of a passionate nature and an intensely conservative mind. These, then, are some abstract considerations of the problem. How do they translate themselves into the actual life of the country, and what signs are there that so many divergent or clashing points of view can ever hope to be reconciled? Let the pages that follow foreshadow the answer.

There is surely no place in the world whose appearance so completely belies its character as the town of Jaffa. Its white and red houses, standing on the shores of the tideless blue waters, its orange groves with their glowing fruit, the wide and fertile plain that stretches behind it to the Judæan mountains, sleeping in the sun, sug-

gest a life of indolence and peace, of slow trafficking, and little toil richly rewarded among fruitful gardens. Few suggestions could be as false, few illusions as transparent. There are few places which for their size can produce such numbers and such diversities of degraded human types. An Eastern port, haunted for the most part by Levantine sailors, is hardly likely to be very strongly addicted to well-doing, but to the usual sum of unpleasant activities Jaffa adds political ones of an exceedingly unhealthy nature. For Jaffa divides with Haifa the honour of being the port of debarkation for the Jewish immigrant, and it is in Jaffa that many of those bright spirits congregate whose helpful contribution towards the re-establishment of the Kingdom of Israel is to scorn the tilling of the soil or the making of highways, but to work without ceasing for that overthrow of everything and everybody — themselves excepted—which to them spells the coming of the kingdom, not of Israel, but of Heaven.

In the winter of 1921 the temple of these chosen ones was in a narrow street of the Menshieh quarter of Jaffa. It was known as the Borochoff Club, and it served as the headquarters of the "Miflagat Poalim Sozialistim," whose tenets are those of the Third International, and whose methods are those of the comrades the world over. It was also a labourers' restaurant, and so lent itself most conveniently to those discussions from which originated alike the literature and the banners which should spread the happy thoughts abroad, and the actual plans of demonstrations, strikes, and revolt against authority that were to put them into action. They came from many lands, the men who met here: Russia and Poland, Germany, Hungary, Czecko-Slovakia were all represented. But though of many differing nations, they had a bond which drew them even more strongly together than the fact of their Jewish blood. They were all fugitives: some from hunger and want, poverty and unemployment—all from some measure of oppression or at least prejudice, and not a few from justice. The records of dangerous political fanatics bear record to the fact that, far from being men of high and pure ideals, they are men of marked criminal tendencies and debased morals. They are more often than not wanted by the police for other infringements of the law than inciting a mob to violence or disseminating revolutionary literature, and their life-stories, as preserved in the records of the Criminal Investigation Departments of Europe, make ugly reading. It was therefore in no way surprising that the activities of these personages in Jaffa should take various unpleasant forms. Their first manifestations took the shape of placards extolling Communism in exuberant terms; these were followed by red-flag demonstrations, a strike, an

assault on the blacklegs of a local factory, and much broken machinery. These were all steps in the right direction, and their success was most encouraging, and by the spring of 1921 the society had reached a quite flourishing condition. The fact that the law-abiding citizens of the Jewish suburb of Tel-Aviv and the agricultural communities of the plain refused to have any dealings with it in no way damped the society's ardour: what it lacked in numbers was more than compensated by the enthusiasm of its followers. The posters and the leaflets became ever more inspired, and their sentiments ever more uplifting: Arab and Jew alike (for the true proletarian is a leveller of all barriers of race and religion) should reap the benefits of "international solidarity," of "the Dictatorship (surely a better-chosen word than most) of the Proletariat," of the "overthrow of British and French bayonets," "Arab and foreign capitalists," "the Dictatorship of the Bourgeoisie," and should alike share in the glorious result, the bright Utopia of a "Soviet Palestine." It is to be supposed that the pious Yiddish hope, "Long live the Free Women of the Communist Society," was not among the sentiments translated into Arabic, but the worthy members of the M.P.S. showed throughout such lamentable ignorance of the Arab mentality that even that would hardly have been surprising.

The climax to which these activities came is a matter of common knowledge: the riots that raged in the streets of Jaffa in May 1921 were the chief events which drew general attention to the Zionist question. There were scenes of sensational bloodshed and ferocity, in which bomb-throwing, shooting, beating, and stabbing all played their part, together with details of great brutality and horror; but even so it was the attacks on the Jewish agricultural colonies which had a greater political significance. Inflamed by the rumours of the Jaffa troubles, which assumed immensely magnified proportions, the Arabs of the villages, of ever-impressionable imagination, seized upon this provocation as an outlet for the mingled feelings of uneasiness, anger, and jealousy that had been nourished by Communist propaganda on the one hand, and the galling sight of their Jewish neighbours' successful agricultural rivalry on the other. It needed but the love of loot, ably fanned by their Bedouin friends into flame, to spur the Arab villagers into action, and the attacks on the Jewish colonies (which had hitherto lived in outward peace at least with their neighbours) were launched. British troops intervened, and the colonies were saved, but the evil precedent had none the less been established.

Such, then, is the recent history of Communism in Palestine. How comes it, it may well be asked, that such things are possible in a country gov-

erned under a mandate granted to a British administration? The answer is not far to seek, and may be found in an office in a Jerusalem street.

In the headquarters of the Zionist Commission in Jerusalem sit gentlemen of noble intellect, great intelligence, and the best university education, striving for an unattainable ideal. In the course of this uplifting pursuit they embarrass the departments of State by writing lengthy epistles in Hebrew, probably marked "Confidential" or "Urgent," which, when transcribed by the only junior clerk both competent and free to do so, are found to relate to the confirmation of a week-old telephone conversation, or an error of P.T. 2 in a statement of accounts. They have, moreover, a pernicious habit which is anathema to the well-ordered mind of a government office, that of treating of two completely different subjects in the same letter. They are not, in fine, the heads of an organisation with pretensions to business methods, but the Israelitish equivalent of a Gaelic League; and though these may be their lesser foibles, their greater ones partake of the same undepartmental character.

It is in this fashion that immigration into Palestine is regulated.

"How many carpenters and masons can you absorb into the country in October?" asks the Zionist Commission, ringing up the Department of Commerce and Industry one morning. Commerce and Industry consults its files, and answers in due course, 100 of the first, and 217 of the second. The Zionist Commission acts accordingly, and informs its branches in, perhaps, Vienna, Warsaw, and Prague, that they are to supply a due complement of each. It is not to be supposed that the emigrants whose names are before the Zionist Commission in these centres are subject to any very searching test of their powers of sawing, planing, or stonecutting, nor that their political opinions are very closely investigated. And yet the Zionist Commission guarantee, once obtained, is a sufficient passport into the Promised Land, and British consuls and Palestine immigration authorities are bound to bow down before it. So, quite irrespective of the facts that the carpenters may be better fitted to be donkey-boys, and the masons may be more highly qualified as crossing-sweepers, and that they may all be members of dangerous secret societies, the Zionist Commission gives its blessing—and when necessary its valuable subsidy,—and the good work goes forward.

These, then, are some actual aspects of a few sides of the problem; it would be well now to look at a very different one. It is exemplified not so much by a chronicle of events this time, as by some scenes that impressed themselves very deeply on the writer's imagination at the end of April 1921.

Spring in Palestine is the

epoch of intense religious activity—there is a perfect epidemic of festivals. The Christian Churches—Latin, Greek, Armenian, and English Protestant — celebrate their several Easters with varying degrees of ceremony. The Jews commemorate the Passover, and the Samaritans, on a hill above Nablus, sacrifice burnt-offerings to Jehovah according to the Mosaic ritual. The Moslems, goaded it is said by so much religious rejoicing to start a competitive feast, celebrate the festival of Nebi Moussa—the prophet Moses—by a pilgrimage to his tomb above the shores of the Dead Sea.

Among the Palestinian towns there is none that has so strong and exclusive a Mohammedan character as Hebron, and it is the faithful of Hebron whose privilege it is to carry the holy banners in the long procession. Now the direct route for the pilgrimage and its banners is straight through the heart of Jerusalem, and it was at the moment when the banners had reached the Jaffa Gate that the writer of these lines reached the bank in the hope of cashing a cheque. There was a great crowd outside the Jaffa Gate, mostly, it might be noted, of tarbushes, and above the crowd rose the bright lances and brown imperturbable faces of a squadron of Indian cavalry. In the confusion that prevailed it was not altogether easy to discover what was happening; it soon became evident, however, that the Hebron banners and their large and enthusiastic following were determined that, however impolitic a plunge into the most Jewish heart of Jerusalem might be, they would not deviate one inch from their direct course. The Indian troops had different orders, and it looked as if the peace of the realm might be rudely shattered. It was at this moment that the Governor appeared—where he most loves to be, where the spears are thickest and the swords flash—and took the delicate situation firmly in hand. The banners, he graciously declared, might go through the city with a suitable escort, which he would kindly provide, and the enthusiastic following must go round by the road. Somebody in the crowd had already been wounded by a lance-thrust, so it seemed probable that the Governor was prepared to make good his declaration by force if persuasion failed; the slightly crestfallen pilgrims, therefore, saw the wisdom of obedience: the banners disappeared down David Street; the followers went round by the road.

Later on the same day I stood on the side of the Mount of Olives, where the road winds up the hill to Bethany, and watched the pilgrimage unroll before me. All the slopes of the hill below the Golden Gate were black with people—men, and women, and children. But they were people of one race, and one race only, the Arab; for at the feast of Nebi Moussa no Jew shows his face; and it is not natural diffidence or delicacy of feeling, but fear, that

keeps him hidden. On the faces of the pilgrims, dancing their rhythmic dances with fierce hand-clappings and feet-stampings, to the music of their wild shrill songs, is written such a passionate devotion to an all-absorbing idea that it might go ill with any holding other spiritual aspirations who chanced to cross their path.

In the municipal tent there were indeed some representatives of other faiths and races —the High Commissioner, his staff, the heads of Government departments, and the notables of the town were gathered together, and among them could be counted more than one of the Children of Israel. But British authority, in whoever vested, is a strong defence, and it was here that the pilgrimage halted, the dancers and the banners paused, and there was an interchange of loyal greetings and good wishes to the holy journey. Then the pilgrims continued their march, and the evening air was full of their frenzied singing as they took their way towards the shrine in the plain far below. The interruption was but a formal tribute to the British mandate, and the fierce crowd turned back with relief to the holy fervour of its religious festival.

In a land where such fiercely opposing elements of thought, as are exemplified in the foregoing pages, exist so closely side by side, what chances are there that they can ever be reconciled? Here are no traditions of civilisation, bringing the healing virtue of toleration, but fanatic Arab, conservative and intolerant; fanatic political Jew, and Jew with a pure if impracticable ideal, and zealous Christian jealous of his holy places: this is the seething pot of Palestine to-day, and it does not seem as though the present British policy were likely to introduce any calming ingredients. A strong British administration, with Englishmen at its head —at least until that day comes when both Arab and indigenous Jew are sufficiently civilised and educated to govern themselves,—above all, the exercise of British control of immigration, the abolition of Zionist Commission subsidies, and the gates of Palestine still open to the suitable immigrant, who must be self-supporting and sufficient unto himself — these are the only lines by which it seems possible reconciliation might be found. For in the hatred of the Bolshevik extremists by both Arab and Jew alike, in the peace in which the indigenous Jews and the new agricultural colonists have equally lived with their Arab neighbours, in that tribute to authority that the pilgrims of Nebi Moussa made on their journey to their shrine, lie surely the seeds of that hope which, if fulfilled, would open a new and shining chapter both in the history of British administration and the troubled story of the Holy Land.

R.

THE A. F. O.'s.

BY "BARTIMEUS."

ANYBODY can buy them.

The Admiralty Fleet Orders have swelled since 1910, when the printed series first started, to a bulky volume containing all that are permanent in upwards of thirty thousand general orders issued to the Fleet and Naval Shore Establishments.

Think of it: eleven years of mandate, behest, rebuke, and precept by which a Navy has ruled its paths! It is like trying to contemplate Infinity: yet any Captain's Clerk is expected to have the gamut at his finger-tips.

The book is a sort of gospel of the Doctrine of Responsibility. The first Order is headed "Responsibility for Moving H.M. Ships through Locks and Basins"; the last, eleven hundred and some odd pages farther on, "Responsibility for Water Level." This refers to boilers, and provides for the complete undoing of the luckless Leading Stoker who allows a boiler to run dry. Skimming through the pages is like contemplating from an aeroplane the reefs and sand-banks, the buoys and leading-marks about an intricate fairway. And over all is raised, as it were, a gigantic forefinger wagging in shadowy admonishment: "It has been brought to the notice of their Lordships . . ."

One would hardly expect to find much in these laconic phrases of officialdom that is of human interest. Yet they deal with the Personnel, Matériel, and Administration of the British Navy. It needs but a trick of memory, a twist of the imagination here and there, to convert this arid volume into a picture-book whose pages evoke memories of things and scenes that were never brought to the notice of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty.

It is curious that the first echo of the war appears under the following staccato heading: "Wounded Officers — Particulars—Report." One would expect something more startling to have been left stranded where the first wave of war broke among the Admiralty Printed Orders. Yet at the time it was, if not uppermost in our minds, certainly very prominent, this business of getting wounded. Our medical staff were zealous fellows, and the P.M.O. had been reading the 'Handbook on the Russo-Japanese War.' He ordained baths and clean underwear immediately before going into action. As, during the first three weeks of the war, action scares in our particular squad-

ron occurred every few hours, this finally called forth serious protests. Heaven knows we were anxious enough to enter into the letter and the spirit of the game we had been trained for all our lives. But when after about three days every clean article of raiment had been exhausted, and the prospect of again finding ourselves in the vicinity of a laundry appeared to be one of the post-war problems, this whim of the P.M.O.'s could no longer be humoured. At his earnest entreaty, however, we dangled from our persons picric-acid pads, rolls of lint bandages, hypodermic syringes of morphia (their use, he grimly explained, was not primarily to deaden pain as much as to ensure that our shrieks of agony might not unman our fellows), and, lastly, a pair of "Pusser's" scissors. We were proud of our scissors. They were the only lethal weapon I ever carried in the Great War for Civilisation, and they were intended (again I quote our Medical Adviser) to slit up our trousers and expose the jagged fractured femur that might be protruding somewhere. . . .

That phase passed. Ward-rooms subscribed to *La Vie Parisienne*, and Naval Surgeons found other things to read than the 'Handbook on the Russo-Japanese War.'

It is towards the end of the 1914 Orders that the first mention appears of the Motor Boat Reserve. The standardised motor-launches which subsequently became familiar features of the coastwise navigation and the harbours and estuaries of the kingdom during the war, had not then appeared on the scene. The Motor Boat Reserve was an unhomogeneous collection of motor craft owned and manned for the most part by amateurs and volunteers. Their war equipment was confined to a rifle and a pair of hand-flags. The first I saw was a Dutch-built craft, owned, I think, by Mr Arnold Bennett. She had just returned from three days' patrol somewhere outside the Swin, and her Captain was stepping ashore to make some purchases before turning in for his well-earned rest. Perhaps it is because he was the first R.N.V.R. motor-boat skipper I ever met that I look back on him as representative of all that helped to build the high traditions of this force.

No detail of that mental photograph is lacking: the grey sea fog drifting in from the Thames estuary, the hulls of yachts on the slips; mud and weed and oyster-shells underfoot, and a tired elderly man, rather bowed about the shoulders, in oilskins, sea-boots, and sou'wester, crunching across the gravel to the roadway. He walked with the slow crabbed action of the deep-sea sailor; his face was the colour of an old brick wall—the very tint of the walls about him,—broken up by innumerable deep wrinkles, with the salt of the sea-spray whitening in the

puckers round his weary eyes. His eyes were very blue, and candid like a child's, but there were memories in them older than the span of many children's lives. Only when he smiled were these memories released; but he smiled not very often, and then rather slowly and reluctantly, as if it hurt the wrinkles to bring them into play too quickly.

God knows how many years he had voluntarily endured the sea for the devout love he bore it. He was well known among the South Sea Islands and in those mysterious backwaters where the Frisian Islands make a lee. If you searched the seven seas for him in vain it was perhaps because his boat was being locked through a Belgian canal while he smoked a pipe with the owner of an adjoining barge. The discerning hall-porter of an exclusive club in Piccadilly appeared to bow to him in special reverence on one of the rare occasions he passed its portal. He was living at the time in a seamen's lodging-house near the London docks, where, as he explained, with his tranquil eyes upon the sunlit traffic streaming past the Green Park, he met old friends, and I suspect, although he did not say so, more lame dogs to help over stiles than he found in Mayfair.

"Things?" he echoed, when once I asked him where on earth in his nomad sea-gipsy life he kept his things. "Things! A man doesn't want any *things!* I don't possess anything more than I can carry in my pockets."

He has sailed since then, in the late summer of his life, into its Haven. Two things he does own now that he cannot carry in his pockets, and if he is no longer allowed to keep them as full as of yore, I fancy his heart is fuller.

"Dental Treatment" is a heading that recalls a scene enacted at a certain Naval Barracks during mobilisation. It was grim enough in its way, but not without humour. I had screwed up my courage to the point which carries a man to the portal of the torture-chamber and there I hovered, debating whether after all I wasn't rather too busy to waste time on purely personal affairs, when the white-clad Surgeon and his acolyte saw me.

"Come in, come in!" he cried heartily. "D'you mind sitting down a second and waiting? I've got one more recruit to attend to, and then I'll fix you." I accepted the respite gratefully, and as I sank into the American-cloth upholstered sofa in the corner, a Regulating Petty Officer appeared in the doorway, propelling a terrified six-foot New Entry Stoker into the room. A steer shot into the reek of a slaughter-house could not have rolled its eyes in more frenzied alarm than this raw recruit. Heaven and the overworked New Entry Office alone knew what startling experiences he had under-

gone in the past few hours. His hair had certainly been cut; as likely as not he had been compelled to have a bath. And now they were going to pull out his teeth!

He looked wildly round at the array of unfamiliar implements, the acolyte with the gas-mask, the relentless visage of the Regulating Petty Officer.

"Ah feel baäd!" he quavered.

"No you don't," retorted the Surgeon briskly, fingering his stethoscope. "Unbutton your trousers."

The last remnant of the lad's nerve broke. He gazed at the strange implement and shook his head with passionate protest.

"Na, na!" he baa-ed, for all the world like a lamb under the knife; "na, na!"

Whoever in bygone ages designed the bluejacket's jumper and flannel did not probably carry his imagination beyond the necessity for protection against wintry winds. Stethoscopes were not catered for—in fact, not invented. The Surgeon merely sought access to the patient's heart as a preliminary to administering an anæsthetic, the peculiarity of the sailor's costume (which is constructed on the button-up-abaft-all principle) not admitting of any other avenue of approach.

But they were busy men: the mobilisation of the Navy for war left little time for explanations calculated to soothe ruffled susceptibilities. I remember watching the deft fingers of the Regulating Petty Officer, and thinking what a good pickpocket he would have made. The Surgeon had his stethoscope to his ear before the gasping victim realised what had happened.

"Eh, but ah feel baäd!" he bleated, as they jerked his garments back to their normal aspect.

"Nonsense!" reiterated the Surgeon, and nodded towards the chair. They did not dally over the invitation. The Petty Officer hoisted him into the chair, the acolyte clapped the nosebag over his face, and the victim, convinced at last that his hour had come, began a desperate fight for life.

They were three to one, and the gas told at length, but it was a stupendous conflict. The convulsed limbs had scarcely sunk into inanition when something whizzed past my head, struck the wall, and fell on the floor. Another followed it, another and another. The Surgeon was jerking stumps over his shoulder with the rapid movements of a farmer's wife plucking a fowl. Five I counted, when he paused and took a deep breath.

The victim sat up, spat into a proffered bowl, and rose giddily to his feet.

"There!" said the Regulating Petty Officer, with the benevolent air of one who had taken out a child for an afternoon's amusement. "That never 'urt you, did it? I

telled you no one was goin' to 'urt you!"

The giant swayed and grinned bloodily at us all in turn.

"Eh!" he said appreciatively, "eh, but ah feel droonk! 'As us bin fighting, laäds?"

Things dental appear to have "been brought to the notice of their Lordships" rather prominently. I apologise for dwelling on the ban beneath which most of the sons of men walk the earth from the cradle to the grave, but a few pages farther on occurs the magnanimous headline, "Dentures—Supply Free." "Dentures" is, I suspect, dentalese for false teeth. Before the days of this order a sailor in need of such embellishment paid for his own. One exception there was, however. He was a flute soloist in a certain flagship on foreign service. Somewhat given to strong drink when ashore, he chanced one contentious night to receive a blow which deprived him of the teeth planted by nature in the front of his mouth. The incident would have passed unnoticed by the Powers that Were had it not affected his performance on the flute.

The Admiral, twirling the stem of his wine-glass in postprandial humour one evening, knitted his brows as the soloist attempted the physically impossible. He studied the band programme. "Damme," quoth he, "is the fellow drunk?"

The Flag-Captain, no musician himself, attempted to explain the nature of the calamity that had overtaken the flutist.

"Tell him," said the dweller upon Olympus, "to go and get measured for a false set and I'll foot the bill."

The musician, conducted by the Bandmaster, complied with the mandate, and in due course was furnished with an entirely new outfit. His smile was one of the things pointed out to visitors. He never relinquished it: like a musical comedy actress posing for a dentifrice advertisement. His performances on the flute were reported by the Admiral's Coxswain to cause tears of pure emotion to stream down the distinguished Flag-Officer's face.

But the old Adam asserted itself. The solo-flutist went ashore in all the glory of his facial embellishment, and looked upon the cup when it may be said to have been a lurid crimson. An American gunboat in the port happened to have given leave to the watch the same evening, and the musician returned on board his ship with a spectacular black eye, but minus, alas! his presentation teeth.

This time the wardroom stepped, metaphorically, into the breach. The flutist's warbling was reported to aid the Admiral's digestion: at all costs the Admiral's digestion must be preserved. By mess subscription a fresh set was procured and harmony restored. But the wardroom took no chances. By order of the Com-

mander the Bandmaster took the "denture" on charge in his account. They were kept in the music store and served out to their wearer together with his flute, music-stand, and score, "as requisite." And when finally he was invalided home from dyspepsia, they were nailed up for luck, horse-shoe-wise, over the storeroom door.

Unexpected prohibitions and inconceivable cautions follow each other in swift sequence from page to page. A cow, finding a pot of paint exposed in a Royal Naval Air Station, consumed it with apparent relish, and, in the words of the resultant order, having been "rendered seriously ill," Commanding Officers are warned for all time to ensure that paint shall be inaccessible to cattle.

The reader sighs for the pencil of a Heath Robinson, and passes on to Coal in Transports and thence to Parsons' Turbines. There is a weird fascination in the irrelevance of the headings. From permission to wear national emblems on Patron Saints' days the mind is invited to leap to Economy in Use of Canvas, and from this consideration to the necessity for immediately reporting the fact of a bower cable having been carried away.[1] A hoary legend among sailors tells of a ship which made such a report by wireless to the flagship: the message was intercepted by Whitehall, and in due course chanced to receive the attention of a Civilian Admiralty Official. "Report immediately," commanded this pundit, "who has carried it away, and what he has done with it."

The question of appropriate badges and mottoes for men-of-war resulted in an order that all Commanding Officers should submit to the Admiralty drawings of the badges in vogue in each ship. A large number, it transpired, owed their origin to the ingenuity of the officers in question—in some cases to that of their female relatives. A few were of the type unlikely to find favour with the College of Heralds, and in this category may be included the badge of H.M.S. *Tormentor*, whose boats and notepaper flaunted the device of a flea. "And not even an Heraldic flea," appears plaintively in the official minutes on the subject.

There is humour in plenty between the lines of these pages. And there is here and there a reference to a once-accepted order of things already fallen, so mutable are all human affairs, and so swift the changes of naval progress—into the dust and shadow of the past. An order relating to the sennit-hat, that picturesque and cumbersome article of a sailor's equipment once inseparable from naval pageantry, serves as a reminder that the sennit-

[1] *I.e.*, parted.

hat is now no more. The vastly more useful sun-helmet has supplanted it, and future generations of little boys in sailor suits, as the elastic is snapped beneath their chins, will ask their nurses in vain the origin of their strange headgear.

And the "Wrens"—who at one time appear to have provided more "copy" to the author of the A. F. O.'s than any other branch of the Naval Service—the Wrens have passed. "W.R.N.S. — Demobilisation of," sounds their knell in the bound volume of the Fleet Orders. It must have awakened not a few regretful pangs in the susceptible hearts of the masculine Navy, which had good cause to be proud of its Little Sisters, with their whimsical motto, "Never at Sea." It is strange that the Washington Conference has ignored the memory of them, for they remain the British Navy's chief incentive to another war.

BOGLE.

BY EDMUND CANDLER.

I OFTEN wondered who the old man in the rickshaw was with the ample white beard, square and broad rather than long: in the distance one might mistake it for a newspaper spread over his lap. Some part of him was paralysed, I believe; yet there was something leonine in the poise of his head and shoulders; he never leant back. The most remarkable thing about him was his eyes. They reminded me of the eagle owl. It was impossible not to notice their intensity as one passed. He did not look at you; he saw you. Whether he noticed you or not you were not quite sure. He did not withdraw his eyes from you, but his gaze was quite impersonal. The middle-aged lady behind the rickshaw, who never kept up, I took for his daughter.

I met him on the Mall nearly every day of my first week in Kifri Pahar, but in the Club I always forgot to ask who he was. Yet when I heard them talking about "old Bogle," I jumped to it at once. Bogle—it was just the name that caught my ear. I had not heard what they were saying, but I instinctively associated it with the man with the white beard. And Amelia? Amelia, of course, was the lady who couldn't keep up. I learnt afterwards that she was his niece.

The doctor had been to his bungalow. No one else ever went near it. Bogle, I gathered, was in a bad way. I remembered that I had not seen him on the Mall for the last two or three days. They were discussing his chances of recovery, rather unfeelingly, I thought.

"Anyhow," I heard Manson, the Club Secretary, say, "the new Cantonment Act will draw his teeth. We will see what is decided at the Committee meeting this afternoon."

"Bogle?" I asked him. "Is that the old man with the white beard who looks several years older than the hills?"

Manson nodded. "That's the trouble," he said. "He *is* older than the hills, or rather he is older than the hill-station. He got here before Kifri had time to spread itself. He has cramped the place."

"Cramped it?" I asked, with the guilelessness of the newcomer.

Here it was pointed out to me not by Manson only, but by several other men in the smoking-room, that one couldn't get anywhere in Kifri without making a detour round the Bogle estate. The old man had bought it in pre-cantonment days, before the cart-

road was made, or the depot or the signalling and musketry courses even thought of.

Bogle seemed to have no personal existence so far as Anglo-Indian Kifri was concerned. He impinged on the small self-centred hill-station as some physical obstruction, like Clodd's Nose, the profile cliff that served as an extinguisher of the sun half an hour before the regulated time. He wouldn't see people, didn't answer letters, was as unaccommodating as the rock on which his bungalow was built. Kifri was all rock. Like other hill-stations, it was abominably congested. There was no flat place where one could let a horse out. The Club had only two tennis courts.

"Who *was* Bogle?" I asked, slipping unconsciously into the past tense.

I gathered that he had been an author of sorts, though what he wrote no one seemed quite sure. The general idea was that it must have been dry-as-dust stuff. He had been associated with several universities.

"Yes. What exactly is Bogle's claim to distinction?" the padre demanded superciliously.

"Are there any of his books in the club?" I asked. Manson sent for the library Babu.

Bogle had always been taken as a matter of course. It never occurred to Kifri that the forbidding-looking ghost in the rickshaw could have counted. His longevity and his adhesiveness to the estate gave him an accidental local importance.

"I believe he wrote travel books," Osborne the G.S.O. 1 observed. "Some one told me he was the only Englishman who had been somewhere. Where was it now?—not Mecca, somewhere in Africa——"

"You don't mean Balkh?" I gasped. And it dawned on me for the first time that the derelict nonagenarian must be *the* Bogle.

I knew now that I had been conscious all along of something subtly reminiscent in the bent figure in the rickshaw, in that forward-leaning leonine poise of the shoulders which even in the paralytic gave one the idea of a frame charged and dynamic, of movement suddenly arrested, like a gesture in a soldier or an athlete preserved after death, when death has been instantaneous.

I had once met Bogle. It was in the early 'eighties, when he was at the zenith of his fame, and I a lad of fourteen. He had spoken to me. Balkh—he had just come back, and I, a small schoolboy, had had the supreme honour of hearing him talk about it, as if it had been an ordinary place just the other side of the common, like Ipswich or Bungay.

It was at least forty years ago, and Bogle must then have been nearly fifty. I had a vision of myself, a very romantic, shy, yet in a way precocious little boy in Eton

jackets. It was a great cross that for economical reasons I might not have two kinds of clothes, and had to wear Etons all the holidays—fish in them, climb trees in them, and grub for chrysalises. I had literary ambitions, and used to write reams of verse on the Byronic model, imagined I was in love, devoured the novels of Whyte Melville and Harrison Ainsworth. I had read all the novels of Sir Walter Scott before I was thirteen. There was not a heath or a clump of Scotch firs, or an old inn or a spinney, that I did not people with highwaymen, knights-at-arms, or damsels in distress. Wayland Smith and Flibertigibbet, Gurth and Friar Tuck, were my familiars at the age of ten. It was not a wooded, hilly, or particularly picturesque district in which I lived, so that any salient feature in it, like a secluded copse or gravel-pit, or an overgrown disused quarry, soon became congested with ghosts.

I longed to see a mountain or a forest or a desert, particularly a desert. The nearest thing to a forest in the neighbourhood were the Felmersham preserves, less than eighty acres of rather thin oak wood on a clayey soil, a carpet of primroses in spring. Here I was permitted to wander by the squire of the parish, the only big landowner in the district. Among realities as distinguished from figments, Lord Felmersham filled a large place in my imagination. As I have said, I was a very romantic little boy, and if having a great respect for a lord was snobbish, I was certainly a little snob. But then I had no suspicion of how the generality of lords were made. The "Baron" at Felmersham, through his association in my mind with the tradition of Bois-Guilbert, was a personage allied to the immortals of romance. I remember my discovery, about a year after the Bogle encounter, of the sordid details of the ennoblement of the original Baron, Felmersham's immediate forebear; with it went one of the first heads of illusion that the guillotine of experience lopped off.

The second Lord Felmersham, whatever failings his predecessor may have had, had acquired, if he had not inherited, the properties of the past. One could not tell that he did not belong to the old aristocracy. He had the grand manner; he excelled in field sports; he had a great love for wild creatures, and killed them in the approved and orthodox way; and he was very kind to small boys and dogs. He must have had a certain sense of humour and a great deal of humanity, or he would not have interested himself in the precocity of the child of the curate of a neighbouring parish. Every Christmas he gave me an illustrated book of travel. I used to read grown-up travel books, and really enjoyed them.

The mere names of the places were a source of delight, and I used to wander among the oaks and elms, repeating the expressive nomenclature of far countries—"Onwards to Hua Hua," "How many miles to Babylon?" "In Xanadu did Kubla Khan." More wonderful than the heroes of books were the writers of them. At the age of ten, next to meeting Ivanhoe, I would have chosen to meet Sir Walter Scott. I am not sure that I would not rather have hobnobbed with Defoe than with Robinson Crusoe. Authors and explorers were the gods of my youth, and they were as remote from experience as gods. I had never seen an explorer or a real author. The only person who wrote, or who was connected in any way with the production of a book, whom I was privileged to see in the flesh, was a friend of my father, also a parson, who had edited 'Tacitus' and written an article on Roman roads for the 'Quarterly Review.' I was dumb in his presence.

It was at Felmersham, of course, that I met Bogle. I had just been made free of the demesne, and was appropriately exploring. A week earlier I had disfigured trees with my jack-knife, knowing the danger of losing one's trail in the deep forest. Unfortunately some of these cicatrices were visible from the main drive, and this had brought a reprimand from the lord of the manor in a letter to my father. My sense of adventure was now heightened by the fear of meeting Felmersham. I was conscious that I had abused the great man's hospitality, but nothing could keep me away from the woods. I was engaged in the fourth traverse. This penetration of Felmersham took me from the west lodge to a corner of the lake in front of the house, and directly bisected the large shallow pond with the moor-hens' nest in it. This entailed wading, and at least a quarter of a mile's burrowing through brambles, for I carried a compass, and with the true instinct of the explorer would not allow myself to be diverted.

In the last lap I must have made as much noise as a rhinoceros scrambling through briers and hazel scrub so thick that one couldn't see a yard in front of one; for when I laid a victorious hand on the hurdles on the wood side of the boundary ditch I found myself looking straight into the eyes of the lord of the manor. He was sitting with a stranger on a bank commanding the spot where I emerged, evidently drawn there by the commotion.

Retreat was, of course, impossible. I slipped over the fence, jumped the ditch, and stood erect in front of him. Covered with burs, scratched, bleeding, perspiring, splashed all over with mud, trying not to look frightened, but with my heart slipping into my boots, I awaited judgment. The thing that made me feel

most abject was the sense of my ingratitude.

But Felmersham smiled. Not a word about those damaged trees. "Have you come to pay us a visit?" he asked, as if the manner of my appearance on the edge of his lawn were quite natural. "You would have found the drive simpler."

I breathlessly explained that I was working through the wood north-east by east by the compass; the drive did not lie in the direct line of approach to the lake.

Here my attention was drawn for the first time to the stranger by Felmersham's side. He had spoken to me, or rather of me. "Evidently," he said, "this young man dislikes thoroughfares?"

"He's your sort, Bogle," Felmersham explained. "A young explorer."

Bogle—could it possibly be *the* Bogle? I wondered. But I had not the courage to ask.

And now, after forty years, I was asking myself the same question at Kifri Pahar. Oh yes; the old man in the rickshaw was Bogle all right, *the* Bogle. There could be no mistake about that.

The tall man with the golden beard who leant back smiling on the bank might very well be a great author or explorer. I felt that if it were really *the* Bogle, I was in the presence of the greatest man of the age. My last Christmas gift from Felmersham had been his 'Travels in Afghan Turkistan.' But it couldn't be Bogle. Such an encounter would be too magnificent. Besides, the squire had described me familiarly to him as "a young explorer, your sort."

The golden beard and eagle eyes were now turned to me. "If you have designs on Central Africa," I heard, "you must learn to go through jungle more quietly than that."

I explained that it was not in Africa that I was going to start on my travels, but in Asia, and in the heart of Asia. I wanted to cross mountains and deserts. Jungles could wait.

"And where do you want to go to in Asia?" the stranger asked.

I replied unhesitatingly, "Balkh."

Felmersham laughed. "Our young friend is already half an Oriental," he observed.

This was, of course, absurd. Flattery or propitiation had not entered my head. Nor was my choice of Balkh as a destination a mere stratagem to put my hopes as to the identity of the stranger to the test. Balkh was the one place I wanted to go to more than any other in the East. I had just read Bogle's book.

"And why do you want to go to Balkh?" he asked.

Without mentioning his book I was able to give him several satisfactory reasons — reasons, however, which could only be known to a careful student of his work.

"This is fame," he exclaimed,

glancing at Felmersham; and I believed, sensitive as I was to anything of the kind, that he spoke without mockery. No doubt my ingenuous tribute pleased him more than gold medals or honorary degrees.

Emboldened, I found courage to ask, "Are you *the* Mr Bogle?"

Bogle laughed. He said it was early in life for me to be so careful with my articles. But he was evidently pleased.

I was taken by the two men into the hall, where, after my clothes had been brushed and scraped by the housekeeper, and I had removed the blood and thorns from my face and hands, I was admitted into the library, where they were having tea. After chaffing me a little, they forgot, I think, that I was in the room, and I sat listening rapturously to Bogle, an urchin who had been permitted to hobnob with the gods, borne along already on the high tide of the adventurous life.

I remember now quite clearly the gist of some of the things Bogle said. They were talking about Muhammadans and Balkh. Felmersham was surprised that he had evaded a certain mullah and preserved a whole skin. "Be a Moslem or a Christian," Bogle said. "A Moslem if you can act the part, but if you value a Muhammadan's respect don't say you think one faith is as good as another. Accept Islam or deny it stoutly. Say you think it a monstrous error, if you like, but don't say you think there may be a great deal in it. Religion with a Muhammadan is a question of black or white—be saved or be damned; there is no betwixt or between; he has the utmost contempt for a ——" Bogle used a word I did not understand. It was a proper name, probably Laodicean.

I treasured this like a *hadis*, an authentic tradition of which I was the custodian, the more precious as it was not in the Book.

At last I tore myself from the seat of bliss, remembering that my visit had begun with an intrusion, and scrupulous not to stay too long. After a grave farewell—Bogle shook hands with me as if I were a contemporary—I set out to find my way home through the wood. This time I kept to the open drives. My vagabondage was at first spiritual. I repeated the names of the deserts I would traverse, the hidden cities from which I would tear the veil, the books I would write—'In the Steps of Marco Polo,' 'The Mysteries of Lhasa,' 'Across the Desert to Samarcand.' My course in the wood had become as erratic as my thoughts. I had lost all idea of direction, when English voices dissipated the drone of the lamas, and interrupted my dreams of Tibet and Cathay. I had come round on my tracks, and was walking straight into Felmersham and Bogle again within a hundred yards of where the main drive enters the shrubbery.

"Hullo! Here's our little Gobi and Shamo," I heard Felmersham exclaim.

"The boy is ubiquitous," Bogle remarked.

Felmersham took up his badinage. "Our young explorer has a compass. He can't have lost his way." This was meant for me to hear.

"I haven't looked at my compass," I blurted out stupidly. "I wasn't thinking where I was walking. I was only walking to think better."

Having delivered myself thus absurdly, I was painfully conscious how abject and immature I must have appeared.

"On the traverse of Gobi and Shamo, eh?" Felmersham had gauged my condition accurately.

Bogle chivalrously came to the rescue of my self-respect. He remarked that star-gazing was a bad habit of his own: it led one into ambushes. But he could think better when he was walking. And he recounted some of the perils of communing with the skies: how he had walked into a tank at Benares, and how he had once trodden on a Russell's viper, luckily on its head with a thick sole.

Bogle was chivalrous. Chivalry, I was persuaded, went with greatness. That was another illusion-head soon to be lopped off, though not through Bogle's agency. I grew warm with pleasure, and probably blushed in the dark when I remembered Felmersham's "a young explorer, your sort." Bogle's sort! Of course I loved the same things. With what magnificent modesty the lion had confessed to a weakness in common with the mouse! I was ubiquitous too. A wonderful word to fling about thus casually. I had never heard it before, but I knew enough Latin to guess what it meant. When I got home I took down 'Travels in Afghan Turkistan' from the row of books on my bedroom shelf, and opened it at the passage embodying the author's reflections on boundaries. "Half my satisfactions in life have been in reaching a pass, or the end of a forest, or the source of a river, or in coming on foot, or on a camel from far inland to the sea." I believe I felt in my secret inside—that inside which dare not admit its presumptuous egoism to the decent workaday consciousness—that Bogle was extraordinarily like me.

They had forgotten Bogle in the Club, and were talking about happier hill-stations, where one could drive a golf-ball, when the library Babu reappeared to tell Manson that he had looked through the catalogue and could find no books by any gentleman of that name.

"Look for him under travel," I suggested. "You will probably find his 'Travels in Afghan Turkistan.'" The Babu departed again on his search.

"Oh *that* Bogle!" Hill of the Secretariat remarked. "I thought he was dead."

"Isn't there a Mount Bogle?" Osborne, the G.S.O. 1, suggested, "up in the Pamirs somewhere?"

Here Cairn, the Deputy Commissioner, put in his chip in the jigsaw puzzle of the reconstruction of Bogle.

"There was a poet Bogle," he said. "A fellow of my college. He had a vogue, I believe. But that was in the 'eighties, before my time. Early Victorian stuff."

All these Bogles were one Bogle.

Evidently two or three people in Kifri were aware in a vague sort of way that there had been a Bogle. The room was crowding now. There was going to be a Committee Meeting. The agenda concerned the Bogle estate—how best to draw the old man's teeth under the new Cantonment Act. It should mean at least three new tennis-courts and a building site, a residential block for officers up for the musketry and signalling courses.

The Babu came back with the information that there was no book in the travel section by any gentleman of the name of Bogle.

Manson nodded indifferently. He was preoccupied with the baiting of quite another Bogle.

"You will find a list of his publications in 'Who's Who,'" I called to him across the table.

"Thanks. I'll look him up," he said. But he was evidently no longer interested.

I would have referred Manson to 'Who's Who' straightaway, only, like Hill, I thought Bogle was dead. It was at least thirty-five years since I had heard of him in any topical connection. I still read him, and often thought of the encounter at Felmersham, a dazzling day in the retrospect of the young hero-worshipper. And it was not through a telescope that I saw him. Bogle had been a great lion in the literary and social world of the 'eighties. That journey to Balkh in disguise—a remarkable exploit! The odds were considerable against his coming back. And his account of it was literature. The Eothen touch. Not that he needed a great theme to make a great appeal: Bogle could make a cockroach interesting. Balkh was merely incidental to his celebrity. Apart from his scholarship and exploration, he was distinguished in a dozen different ways. You would find an edition of his collected poems in every country-house or rectory. And he had a niche of his own in fiction! That was another side to him, perhaps the most original. His novels were not exactly novels, yet it was difficult to fit them into any other category. He was in advance of his age here. A Bogle novel had very little thread to it; to read it was like going out for a walk with Bogle and listening to his delightful, whimsical, spontaneous talk, which led nowhere. He was a naturalist, scholar, orientalist, antiquarian. Not only

were mountains named after him, but beetles, bugs, birds, shells, and mice—not to mention the Bogle manuscripts. Possibly there were too many Bogles, and that is why he missed a niche among the immortals.

I extracted 'Who's Who' from the library shelf with an interest that this jumble of records of the mediocre and the great had never before evoked. It ought to give me the clue I looked for. Naturally I had imagined that Bogle was dead. I had dwelt in places where one was often without posts or newspapers for long periods, and I might very well have missed the obituary notices. If he had not departed to the shades, how else could one explain this sudden and complete abdication, a silence of nearly forty years?

The book of reference was disappointing. There was no entry since 1889. No club or recreation was quoted. No address. His last publication was a monograph on the Torgut Mongols. I read through his honours and distinctions: they took up half a column. Besides his British degrees he was Hon. Doctor of fourteen foreign universities, a corresponding member of the Institute of France, and other learned bodies of Europe.

It was not surprising that the men in the Club knew little or nothing about Bogle. After all, he did not belong to their epoch, or to mine for that matter, though I was probably five years older than any of them. Besides, I doubt if the crowd at Kifri that year were particularly interested in their own generation, much less in the one that preceded it. "Meredith and Hardy?" I heard Manson say. "No, I haven't read any of their novels. What did they write?" Then, as an afterthought, "Oh yes, I have though. Didn't Hardy write 'How to be happy though married'? A jolly good book."

"This is fame," as Bogle would have said. Did he care about fame? He was glad, I know, that certain stray scintillations of his spirit had lighted a flame in a boy of fourteen. The ego cannot be detached from one's work. But of ambition in the vulgar sense of the word I am sure he had none. In his relations with Kifri he reminded me of a great owl surprised in daylight by a flock of little birds.

The meeting was over, and they were flooding out of the Secretary's office into the reading-room and the bar. Kifri, I learnt, was going to give Bogle the option of disgorging his disproportionate share of the hill-top without having recourse to the Act. There was nothing generous or chivalrous in the proposition. It meant, in other words, that they prepared for themselves the satisfaction of witnessing his climb down. In the meantime he might, of course, die. It seemed the happiest solution.

I asked the doctor what his chances were of recovery.

"He might get over it," he said. "He has made some astounding rallies. He must have been as tough as whipcord."

Indestructible, I thought—*inébranlable*, rather. The French, as usual, had the better word. In the rickshaw he gave me that impression of poise one sees sometimes in sculpture, of muscles petrified in the act of springing, and in the eye one found what one might expect from the moulding of the neck and shoulders, that look of being on the point of attainment so rarely seen in repose. A great hand had descended on him and arrested his activities.

Manson joined us. "Do you think he'll live?" he asked the doctor.

The doctor repeated that he might live: he had hopes.

Manson looked relieved. "I hope he will last out the month," he said.

"For his own sake," I said, "I hope it will not be so long."

"Oh, it's not that!" Manson admitted with candid brutality. "He has been so pigheaded about it. I think he ought to be made to see that we are right, that we have got the law on our side."

Manson was not alone in his sense of the fitness of retributive justice. Even the padre expressed a pious hope that this recalcitrant member of his flock might be shorn alive.

As I passed through the hall the ladies were discussing Amelia.

"She ought to be asked to resign," I heard. "It is preposterous that she should be allowed in after the way her uncle has behaved."

Amelia's invasions amounted to a shy furtive visit on mail days once a week, when she sat in a corner of the ladies' reading-room immersed in the illustrated papers, "glancing about and fidgeting," as some one described her, "like a sparrow that has come too near the table in search of crumbs."

On the way to my bungalow I thought of my early literary ambitions, my youthful flights in the wake of Bogle. They continued even at Oxford and a year or two afterwards. Luckily, I had not succeeded in getting a single manuscript printed at the publisher's expense. I had ceased to be ambitious soon after the age of twenty-five.

"After all," I reflected, "isn't curiosity enough to give salt to life?"

Looking up, I saw Amelia walking very fast in my direction, a lonely and inelegant figure. This evening, I thought, she would have outpaced the rickshaw coolies if Bogle had been with her. When she passed me she turned her face aside to the cliff, as if to adjust her pork-pie hat, wrestling with the wind. I noticed the same movement as she overtook another group standing by the bandstand, and guessed that

it was a stratagem to hide her tears.

Early the next morning I left Kifri, and was away three days pheasant-shooting on a neighbouring ridge. The whole time Bogle and Amelia were hardly ever out of my mind. On the third day I climbed up the hill to my bungalow from across the valley without meeting a soul. In the afternoon I was standing in my shirt sleeves in my dressing-room, skinning a monâl pheasant, my hands covered with arsenical soap, when I heard a soft padding sound of feet outside muffled by the pine-needles. I called to Pereira, my Goanese butler, in the next room opening on to the verandah, to look out and tell me what was passing. Something heavy was being carried past my gate.

I knew instinctively what it was. I had a vision of Amelia, solitary and weeping, unsupported by the representatives of the fourteen universities. Kifri was removing, as decently as possible, an impediment.

Pereira, standing solemnly at the door of my dressing-room, announced, "Sah, one gentleman, he finish."

ECHOES FROM THE MARSHES;

(BEING FURTHER TALES OF THE MA'ADAN.)

BY FULANAIN.

THE MOTHER OF GOLD.

I GLANCED at the clock, and hastily signed the remaining papers on my table, for it was already a quarter to nine, and I had promised to meet Braxter at 8.30. I was just preparing to leave the office when there appeared in the doorway the large square figure of Lieut.-Colonel W. F. Cunningham, C.M.G., D.S.O., of Headquarters, L. of C. (that is not his real name). It was not often that he honoured me with a visit, but my work in connection with river raids had more than once brought me into touch with him.

The Colonel was obviously bursting with indignation, and lost no time in explaining the reason. During the night his launch had been boarded by thieves, who had made off with a leather dressing-case, containing not only a valuable gold-mounted toilet set, but a small despatch-box of valuable documents. It appeared that he had taken every care, had posted a sentry, had even anchored out in mid-stream—which last precaution, I could not help remarking, was not likely to be very effectual, seeing that the Ma'adan are practically amphibious.

He brushed my remark aside. Would I kindly make every effort to recover the case, or, failing that, exact a fine of Rs. 500, the estimated value of its contents—exclusive, of course, of the important papers, for which no price could be fixed.

I promised to do my best, and asked where exactly the theft had occurred.

"Between Hamdan and Gurmat Shargi," replied the Colonel.

I reminded him that by his own orders all boats were prohibited from stopping for the night in that reach of the river, owing to the number of successful thefts which had already occurred there.

The Colonel flushed, and said shortly that he had not come to be told what he should have done, but to tell me what I should do—to wit, find his lost property, in which not very hopeful task I assured him I would do everything in my power to succeed.

Braxter, who was attached to the neighbouring military post, was not in the least annoyed at being kept waiting. He was—for he is dead now, poor fellow!—a very sound doc-

tor and a keen archæologist. Some time ago I had promised to take him on my next trip into the marshes, where the ishans on which the marsh Arabs live, and which appear to be the remains of ancient cities, offered a rich and as yet virgin field to the excavator. As a condition, I had stipulated that he should bring along his medicine-chest.

Our mashhuf, poled by my four best mashhufchis—Halshad, Mashraf, Fadhal, and Mujaid,—slipped out of the mud-coloured river into the clear blues and greens of the marshes. It was a lovely autumn morning, with the first cold nip in the wind, and the marshes showed us their most attractive side. They were full of interest to Braxter, who was one of those fortunate persons who seem to know something of everything. Except for the shootable varieties, I had never particularly noticed the birds in the marshes; but Braxter was continually pointing out new varieties as they flapped out of the reeds, or fled with shrill cries before the mashhuf.

We stopped at the first little village, and Braxter administered a number of powerful draughts. The people were most anxious to be given treatment, and regarded the innovation of my being accompanied by a doctor on my visits as a most welcome one. When, a couple of hours later, we reached another cluster of reed huts, we found—so swiftly does news travel in the marshes—that the villagers were already anxiously awaiting us, or rather the medicine-chest, and Braxter had his hands full.

All this took time, and in consequence it was well on in the afternoon before we reached the ishan which I wanted my companion to see — Umm Dhahb, the Mother of Gold, so called because on several occasions gold coins had been found there.

The low mound rose out of its fringe of reeds, sloping gently to a height of perhaps fifty feet above the level of the surrounding water. How many centuries had slipped silently away since the marsh had engulfed and hidden for ever the city that once reared its dwellings and its temples here? Were they Sumerians who built it, savage folk who only left their homes in the sea-land to attack the Babylonian intruders in the north? Or was it the work of peaceful cultivators of a later age, growing rich in the wheat country made fertile by the irrigation schemes of Babylon, until the great river, suddenly changing its course as it has done more than once in the course of history, submerged lands and cities beneath the waste of water which to-day makes almost impregnable the island homes of the Ma'adan? I did not know, and Braxter could not tell me.

Umm Dhahb was a favourite

burying-ground among the marsh Arabs, with the result that, though no scientific excavations had ever been carried out here, many fragmentary remains had been cast up by the grave-diggers. The ground was strewn with broken pottery, most of it glazed the bright blue of a thrush's egg. Here and there lay shapeless masses of masonry, covered with a rich dark-green glaze, the whole looking as though it had been subjected to intense heat. Near the summit we found traces of a series of small arches, and, not far away from them, what seemed to be the foundation of some great wall. The bricks, mud-coloured and flat, and some two feet square, were joined together with a mortar which resembled that of the Romans in its tenacity and strength.

Braxter was anxious to find some more of the coins which the Arab grave-diggers occasionally unearthed, and perhaps from them to gain some idea of the date of the mound; but as the sun was already sinking we had to make our way back to the river. I suggested to the two headmen who had accompanied us from the village that, as some small return for the doctor's kindness, they should on the morrow take a party of their Bait to dig on Umm Dhahb, and send him any gold coins which they might find.

Radhi, an old man with the fine rugged face of a St Peter in a mediæval painting, promptly untied a corner of his kafiyah, and proffered a Turkish lira. I explained that the doctor did not want payment, but that he was interested in Umm Dhahb, and would like to have a piece of gold such as had been found there before. Somewhat puzzled, the headmen agreed to do as I suggested.

. . . . . .

A few days later four men from the Bait Suwailim appeared in my office, and laid on the table a curiously-shaped round object made of gold. I picked it up and looked at it.

"Where did you find this?" I asked.

"For a whole day, O Hakim, we dug on Umm Dhahb, and found nothing," said the spokesman. "Then also a second day we dug, and not until the morning of the third day did Allah reward our toil; and what we found we have brought to your Honour."

He pointed to the object in my hand. I was regarding it with mixed feelings, for it bore a complicated monogram, of which the initials were W.F.C.!

I thanked the deputation, on behalf of the doctor, for their industry in digging.

"But before you go," I added, "I must inform you that your Bait is fined Rs. 500 for stealing a box of leather from a launch."

There was an amazed silence, broken only by the youngest

of the four men. "How did you find out?" he stammered.

The others scowled him into silence.

"I know all," I said, feeling rather like Sherlock Holmes unravelling a plot for the benefit of his dear Watson. "You greased your body all over, you swam out to the launch with a dagger in your teeth, you climbed on board and stole a box of leather. Inside it were many bottles such as the doctor had, and from one of these you took the golden top and brought it to me." I held it up accusingly.

The consternation on their dark faces was rather ludicrous. At last, "This is a very heavy fine, Sahib," said one. "If we bring back the box with all that is in it, will your Honour let us off the five hundred rupees?"

"I will let you off half," I said.

. . . . . .

A week later Colonel Cunningham's missing dressing-case was brought in, together with the fine of Rs. 250. I checked its contents by the list he had given me. Nothing seemed to be missing.

The man chosen by the Bait to bring it to me was old Radhi.

"Why did you send that piece of gold for the doctor?" I asked him.

"Hakim," he answered, "at your orders we dug all day on Umm Dhahb, and when we found nothing but bricks and pieces of blue stone some were for giving up. But we were grateful to you and to the doctor for the good medicine given to us and to our children, and we agreed to dig one more day. Still we found nothing. Then said Hamud, 'The Sahib desires a piece of gold dug up from this ishan to keep off evil spirits. Let us bring hither a piece of gold and bury it to-night. To-morrow we will dig it up and send it to the Hakim.' And this seemed to all of us a good thought, and we did as Hamud had said, and brought the gold to your Honour, and you fined us heavily. Long and hard we worked, Sahib. You can see the great depth of our digging, though we are not cultivators accustomed to toil with spades. Also our women point their fingers and mock us, saying, 'You buried the piece of gold to be a safeguard against evil spirits, and behold the evil fortune it has brought you!' It is very hard," concluded old Radhi pathetically, "to be made a mock of by our women."

I laughed, remitted the fine, and sent him home. Then I packed up the dressing-case, and despatched it to its owner by the hand of one of my shabanahs, who brought me back, rather to my surprise, a charming letter, in which the Colonel hoped that his annoyance at losing the case had not made him over-hasty, thanked me for my trouble in recovering it, and confessed that the "valuable documents" were letters from his wife!

THE DEBTOR.

Saiyid Fakhir entered my office bearing a pile of petitions. To keep up the dignity of his title of "Commissionaire of Police," he had somehow obtained an officer's khaki tunic, which, several sizes too big for him as it was, looked bigger than ever by contrast with his exceedingly tight pair of trousers, the discarded garments of some "Tommy." Round his legs were wound a pair of ragged puttees, which vanished inside enormous ammunition boots. The only part of his attire in which he had remained faithful to the custom of his country was his headdress, the usual kafiyah and agal of the Arab—the former dyed indigo blue to mark him a Saiyid, or descendant of the Prophet. So dressed, his lugubrious countenance making him appear always on the verge of tears, Saiyid Fakhir was a figure to provoke a smile even when the depressing south winds of midsummer were at their worst.

The Commissionaire of Police regarded me mournfully.

"Praise be to Allah," he said; "thanks to the presence of your Honour, the town has slept in peace and security."

This was Saiyid Fakhir's matutinal greeting, and meant precisely nothing. Whatever calamities he might go on to report—fire, murder, or theft—his opening formula was ever the same.

I waited for any further announcements.

"Talib, son of Abdul Wahab," he went on, "is still in custody. It is true that the violence has left him, but his madness remains. If your Honour agrees, I will keep him in the prison awhile, lest he do further hurt to the sons of Adam."

I agreed, for in the absence of lunatic asylums no other method of dealing with these unfortunates presented itself.

"His wife has come in to the town," continued Saiyid Fakhir, "beseeching that he may be released. I bade her send a petition to the Hakim. It is among these I have now brought to your Honour."

He put the papers on my table, and with a clumsy salute left the room, to inspect the force of nineteen policemen and one ombashi, or corporal, which acknowledged his gloomy rule.

I looked through the petitions until I found the one to which he had referred.

"That which had to be put before your Excellency" (it began with the invariable formula), "the husband of the petitioner, Talib bin Abdul Wahab, became mad three weeks ago because he was indebted to Abbas, and he is now in prison. The petitioner

therefore requests the high Governor, of his justice and mercy, to set free the said Talib, that she may take him to Abbas, where he will be released from his madness. And the order is your order."

Every Arab had the right to "throw," as the phrase is, a petition to the political officer of the district in which he lived. The only stipulation made was that the document should bear an eight-anna stamp—a regulation designed in the first place to prevent an unnecessary number of frivolous petitions from reaching one. But when the tribesmen discovered that justice was no longer a commodity to be purchased by the highest bidder, but could be obtained by rich and poor for the same small sum, they bombarded their political officers with petitions to such an extent that the sale of eight-anna stamps, in a very short space of time, was bringing in to the Revenue Department a sum as useful as it was unexpected.

It was a strange kind of justice which the tribesman got—a hybrid of public-school fair play and tribal custom,—but it suited these wild sons of the marsh or desert. Though rough and ready, it was final; moreover, it was prompt, and, above all, cheap. No fees were needed for barrister, solicitor, or their Arab equivalents. A man wrote — or, as a rule, paid some mulla in the bazaar to write—his petition, affixed his stamp, and in due course appeared before the political officer, to be assisted, advised, or admonished, according to the nature of his grievance.

Every morning I dealt with a number of these petitions. Nothing was too great a matter or too small—cases of murder, arson, rape, theft, or divorce were dealt with as they came, together with questions relating to the recovery of debts, complaints against husbands addicted to wife-beating, or requests for the punishment of persons who had spoken disrespectfully of the petitioner's ancestors. One by one the seekers after justice were called into the office—a bare whitewashed room, in which a punkah made of green cloth of hideous design swung slowly overhead. Behind my desk a wide window looked out on to the river, and the cool shadows of the date-garden on the opposite bank. Above it, in the space between the wall and the mouldering wood-work, lived a colony of bats, whose querulous squeaks would strive in vain to rival the punkah's dismal creaking, which all the oil of the A.P.O.C. was powerless to prevent.

The petitioners belonged to every shade of rank and class in the district; but, purely as petitioners, they fell into two or three rough divisions. There were those who came in with honeyed phrases on

their lips, and made a great ado of kissing one's hands, or even feet. I found that I was always prejudiced from the first against these. Before the case began I had decided against them, so that in the effort not to be influenced by any bias, I would give them, in the end, a more lenient judgment than perhaps they deserved, with the result that they gained their ends, though by a very different method from the one they thought they were pursuing.

To another category belonged those who considered themselves of the "Ashraf," the "upper classes" of the community. These would enter the office with a hurt and injured air, greatly resenting the fact that, as was often the case, the petition of some lowly fellah or cultivator was the cause of their being summoned there. Offering me the stateliest and most polite of greetings, they would seat themselves on the tall benches round the walls, and would appear still more deeply injured when the low-born petitioner was also bidden to sit down. The Arab mind is very slow to grasp the fact that in the eyes of the law all men are equal.

The great majority of cases concerned the simple tribesman. He would enter, touch my hand with his, carry his own to his lips, and kiss it. Then, at a word, he would squat down on the floor in front of me, and with straightforward look and word begin his story—a plain unvarnished tale told simply, with no attempt at seeking for euphemisms or disguising the cruder aspects of life.

I remember on one occasion an old army friend of mine, chancing to pass through the little town, came into my office one morning during the trial of three or four tribesmen.

"My dear chap," he said, "you will never instil any discipline into these fellows if you let them sit about like that. You should make them stand in front of you in a proper manner."

I said nothing, for on first leaving my regiment and becoming a political officer, I too had expected petitioners to stand stiffly before my table, and had in my own mind put the Arabs down as an inarticulate, stiff-tongued race. But experience taught me that these same Arabs, once squatting on the floor in the immemorial attitude of their race, became ready of speech and even eloquent.

But this is a digression—though, as a matter of fact, the time it takes to read is probably no longer than the time I spent in puzzling over the document before me.

I called in the petitioner. A small black-shrouded figure entered, and sat down in front of my table. I asked her to explain the meaning of her

petition, for it had conveyed little to me; and in the plaintive sing-song accents of the Arab woman, she began her story.

"May Allah lengthen your years, and increase your prosperity! I have been to the doctor, but he did not understand my words, and thought I was becoming even as my husband, whom because of his madness your Honour has shut in the prison. But if the Hakim will listen, I will make all clear, and my husband will be cured of his affliction.

"May Allah preserve you! The reason of his madness goes back to many years ago, when he was but a new-born babe. For his father had married four wives, and was still childless, and the people mocked him; but when at last he took a fifth wife, she brought forth a son. And as soon as he was born, his father lifted him high above his head, saying, 'Thanks be to Allah, who at last has blessed me with a son! Now I swear that he shall visit the great Abbas; with his necklet and earrings he shall pay honour to the tomb of the Avenger.'"

The woman had gained confidence as she told her story, and the black abba covering her head was pulled a little aside. I saw a face remarkable for the smallness of its features—tiny mouth and nose, and small dark eyes. It seemed the face of a child, but it bore the traces of sorrow and toil, and the expression was that of a middle-aged woman. In each nostril she wore a gold ring set with small blue stones, and her face was ornamented, after the Arab fashion, with indigo marks—a line above the eyebrows, and a short vertical stroke from the lips to the point of the chin.

"But my husband was yet a child," she went on, "when his father died; and though he is now forty years of age he has never performed the vow made in his name. So at last Abbas has grown angry and has made him mad. But if I could but take him to the tomb, that his father's oath might be fulfilled, the anger of the Avenger would be appeased, and my husband would be himself once more."

"How long has he been mad?" I asked.

"May Allah give you power to overcome your enemies! About a month past I and his mother noticed that he sometimes could not bring his lips to utter the words he wished to speak. And one night he awoke me from sleep, and he was trembling in every limb.

"'Sodanah, Sodanah,' he cried, 'I have dreamed that Abbas is angry with me, wrathful because I have not visited him as my father vowed I should.' And he kissed me from my forehead to my feet, and swore not to shave his head until he had been to the tomb of Abbas.

"But the next day he wandered away from the village. And when he saw any man coming towards him, he would run weeping and kiss him, crying, 'Ah, Abbas, friend of our beloved Ali, I have come to fulfil my vow.' Still he did harm to no man, until one day a stranger struck him as he tried to embrace him; and from that time my husband's madness made him fierce and wild, so that he would suddenly strike other men, and for that reason has he been cast into prison.

"Hakim," she continued earnestly, "I beg your Honour now to order his release, that I may take him to Abbas, where the madness will depart from him."

"But the journey to Kerbela is a long one," I said, "and you are a woman, weak and small. How could you prevent him from attacking others, or even yourself, if the madness came upon him?"

"Ah, Sahib (may Allah guard you!)," she said quickly, "I have thought of that, and the husband of my sister has promised to accompany us and to keep him under his care. And for the money, I will sell my bed and my jewels—all I have I will gladly sell, that my husband may be restored. Only one golden lira will I keep, and he shall throw it to Abbas at the tomb. Then surely the Father of the Hot Head will no longer be angry, and my husband will return with me at peace."

Are the days of faith-cures over? In the face of the woman's unfaltering confidence, I could not refuse to let her try her plan. Sending for Saiyid Fakhir, I ordered him to release Talib as soon as his brother-in-law arrived to take charge of him; and, with tears of gratitude streaming down her face, the woman kissed my hand, calling down every blessing of Allah on my head.

. . . . . .

Some weeks later I saw her again.

"No," she said, in answer to my question. "He is still mad. Doubtless Abbas is angry that he delayed so long. He will not lightly pardon those forty years during which the vow was unfulfilled. But in time, insha Allah, he will repent; and next year, when I have saved enough to take my husband again to the tomb, perhaps it will seem to the Avenger that he has been punished enough, and the madness will be lifted from him."

I should like to know whether Abbas, Father of the Hot Head, Giver of Water to the Thirsty, the Father of Graciousness, has yet relented.

THE OATH.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the bones of Ali, son of Musa.

A political officer, when a crime was committed in his district, had to assume in succession a number of varied rôles. It was his duty first, as investigator, to endeavour to trace the criminal; that done, he became prosecutor; in the third place, as jury he decided whether the man were innocent or guilty; and finally, in the capacity of judge, passed sentence. It was in the first of these rôles, on which all the rest depended, that I was so often helped by Ali bin Musa, or rather by the sanctity of his bones.

Arabs are inveterate liars. They are ready to swear falsely the most solemn oaths — by their honour, by their Prophet, and by their God. But there are certain holy shrines which the superstition, or faith, of generations has credited with such powers that no Arab will swear a false oath by them, and of these shrines that of Ali bin Musa is one.

In spite of the unbounded reverence in which his tomb is held, this Ali does not seem to have been an important figure historically, and it is not easy to find out anything about his life. A number of rather uninteresting miracles are attributed to him, but his fame consists chiefly in reflected glory from the great names of his brother, Ali al Ridha, whose shrine in Persia is a well-known place of pilgrimage, and his father, who gives his name to the famous mosque and quarter of Baghdad, Kadhimain.

Nevertheless, thousands of pious Muslims flock every year to the shrine of Ali. He is buried close to the river, in a lonely spot far from any town. The blue dome, rising from the midst of its group of willows, is a welcome sight to the traveller whose eyes are weary of the dull brown banks and barren desert between which the river winds for so many featureless miles. The willows are fine old veterans, thick-trunked, with widely-spreading branches. Beneath their shade sit the pilgrims, a strange picturesque assembly, gathered together from who knows where at the call of a common faith.

The people sit in little groups. Four or five families, perhaps, have travelled together, and babies, chickens, cooking-pots, here and there a sheep or two, are all dumped indiscriminately on the patch of ground which they have chosen for their camp. Towards sunset the men may be seen sitting in a little company apart, smoking usually in silence, while the women prepare the evening meal. Each family has its own fire of sticks, and in the

light of the leaping flames the bright reds and greens of the women's garments show in vivid contrast to the sombre black "shailas" on their heads. The children's brown bodies, unhampered by any clothes unless the merest tattered rag, shine roundly in the firelight, and their shrill voices echo in the still evening air. By the river bank are moored the mashhufs in which the pilgrims have travelled, the graceful lines of their tall curved prows silhouetted, black and sharp, against a background of curling blue smoke and ruddy firelight.

Ali's tomb, however, is not the resort of pilgrims only. Its value to the political officer lies in the fact that to it may be sent any suspected criminal. If he swears on the sacred shrine that he is an innocent man, he is treated as such, and the prosecution is dropped. If he refuses to go, he is considered to have as good as admitted his guilt, and is punished accordingly. How useful the bones of such holy men were, perhaps still are, to those whose lot it is to administer justice throughout Mesopotamia is shown by the following example — one of many, but clear in my memory, because it was the first occasion on which Ali bin Musa had come to my assistance.

The convalescent stages of sand-fly fever are not usually marked by any great amiability of temper on the part of the patient; and when my servant announced that Saiyid Fakhir, accompanied by a Basrawi, or townsman of Basra, wished to see me, I concluded that only a bribe of some magnitude could have induced him to worry me with a petitioner at this time. A large bribe indicated important business—important, anyhow, to the Basrawi; and, if only by way of diversion from the dulness of lying in bed, I decided to have him in.

The petitioner, Jaafer, was a stout and portly merchant, very hot and nervous, and in great distress of mind. He had hardly entered my room before he burst into a torrent of explanation. So hurried and incoherent was he that I caught no more than a word here and there. Buffaloes, starving wife and children, stolen liras, the justice of the great British Government, were jumbled together in a hopeless maze of words, and before I had gathered the drift of his story, the unhappy Jaafer had broken into loud sobs, and was wiping away copious tears with the ends of his kafiyah.

My "Commissionaire of Police" came to the rescue with a brief explanation. Jaafer, with intent to grow rich quickly, had borrowed £T400, meaning to buy buffaloes and sell them at a profit. He had then come to the rice-growing lands of my district, where

buffaloes abound, in order to purchase from the cultivators, and from their wilder cousins, the Ma'adan. He had stayed in one of the villages, and on his third night, while the preliminaries of bargaining were still going on, the four hundred liras had been extracted from under his pillow, the thief or thieves getting away successfully.

The unwritten tribal law in a case of this sort is curiously like that of many European hotels. If Jaafer had handed over his gold to the headman, one Haji Sa'ad, in whose village he was staying, the latter would have been responsible for its safety. But the suspicious townsman had told no one of his money, though many of the villagers, knowing his errand, must have guessed that he had it, and in gold too, for in those days paper money was not accepted by the tribes-people.

I gave the Basrawi very little encouragement in his hope of recovering the money lost through his own foolishness. At the same time, I resolved to do all I could to trace the criminal, for every uncaught thief is an encouragement to other law-breakers. Getting rid of the disconsolate merchant, therefore, I dictated a letter to Shaikh Shibal, in whose land the village was situated, ordering him to come in and see me.

In Turkish times the various shaikhs retained their large tracts of land as long as they paid up the very high revenue demand of the Ottoman Government. Inter-tribal fighting, so long as money went to Constantinople, was rather encouraged than otherwise, since it kept the great shaikhs weak. But in the early days of our occupation, when the security of the lines of communication was of primary importance, and any tribal disturbance to be avoided, these tracts of land were given out to the same holders (or, if the shaikh himself had fled to the Turks, to his most suitable relative), and were leased at a merely nominal figure, on the sole condition that the shaikh was entirely responsible for law and order in his area.

My former dealings with Shibal had not prepossessed me in his favour. The effect of his fine features and commanding figure, his beard dyed black by applications of henna and wasma, and his deep sonorous voice, was spoiled by the shifting restless eyes which proclaimed him a coward both morally and physically. Our interview on this occasion was short. I informed him of the theft, reminded him that, as shaikh, he was responsible for law and order in his territory, and that he must therefore refund the stolen money and deal himself with the thief.

"I am a true servant of Government," he replied smoothly. "Every order given

by your Honour is upon my head. But, Sahib, is this your well-known justice? Does your Excellency give credence to every story brought by lying tongues? Doubtless this townsman gambled away the money in the bazaar, and to save himself from the wrath of his master who had entrusted it to him, spread this tale of theft and robbery."

"Jaafer can bring witnesses," I said, "to prove that he had the money in the village of Haji Sa'ad."

"Sahib," replied the shaikh, "it is known to your Honour, better even than to me your servant, that for two krans an Arab will swear a false oath."

"As many did in the case of Ferhan," I said. The shot went home, for some time ago Shibal had been mixed up in a very doubtful case, from which he had only extricated himself by paying false witnesses.

"Ma yukhalif,"[1] he said, shrugging his shoulders. "If this townsman will swear on the tomb of Ali bin Musa that such a sum was indeed stolen as he says, I will pay him what he lost from my own pocket."

Jaafer was despatched accordingly, accompanied by a representative of the shaikh, to the tomb of Ali, where he was only too willing to swear to having been robbed of a sum of £T380 in gold, and Rs. 45 in silver. Shibal was as good as his word. Without any delay he sent in the required sum of money, which I handed over to the merchant.

The surprise on the plump countenance of Jaafer was amusing to behold. He had had little hope at first of ever recovering his money; and when he heard that Shaikh Shibal had sent it in, he quite expected that a large proportion would stick to the fingers of myself or of my office staff as compensation for our trouble. Now he received the whole amount, and left the office wearing the oddest expression of mingled bewilderment and gratification.

Thus, with all due thanks to the bones of Ali, the case was settled—or so I thought. But my self-congratulations were short-lived. Haji Sa'ad, headman of the village in which Jaafer had been robbed, came in to see me, bearing his petition in his hand. He was a pleasant-faced, dignified old man, with an honest expression and straightforward manner, very different from the oily smoothness of his shaikh.

The reason of Shibal's willingness to pay up the stolen money was soon apparent. He had applied to the headman under him the principle which Government had applied to him, and had held Haji Sa'ad responsible for the theft committed in his village. Accord-

[1] No matter.

ingly, he had made no effort to trace the thief, but had simply confiscated from Haji Sa'ad a number of buffaloes to the value of £T400. The unfortunate headman, thus suddenly, through no fault of his own, deprived of his all, now appealed to a beneficent and merciful Government to restore his buffaloes.

"Hakim," said the old man earnestly, "your Honour knows that the robbing of a guest brings bitter disgrace upon us. If this Jaafer had entrusted his wealth to me, all would have been well; but, even though I knew not how great a sum he had, I would pay it back in full, rather than that dishonour should come upon my village. But, Sahib, the sum is too large. Our shaikhs" —he dropped his voice—"are tyrannous, and leave us barely enough for the needs of life. And now Shibal, to repay this theft, has taken away all my buffaloes, and I am ruined. I beseech your Honour to save me from this injustice."

I was sorry for Haji Sa'ad, but I hardly felt in a position to help him much, owing to Shibal's cunning move. If I ordered him to restore the buffaloes, on the ground that his lands were granted him at an absurdly low figure, on the sole condition that he alone was responsible for order, his reply might well be that he, in his turn, adopted the same principle in dealing with those under him—a statement which, however sure one might be that he was in reality grinding out their last penny, was difficult to disprove; for we were still new to the country, and moreover at this time, when matters were looking very black round Kut, our policy was one of non-intervention between the shaikh and his tribes.

It was clear that I could do nothing for the old man, short of recovering the money somehow from the thieves themselves. I told him to go back to his village, and send out men to make full inquiry as to any stranger who might have been seen in the neighbourhood at the time of Jaafer's visit.

A week later Haji Sa'ad came back, not very hopeful, to inform me that a certain Daghar, a man of doubtful reputation belonging to the Metafar tribe, had been seen not far from the village on the day before the theft. Inquiries had shown that he was absent from his home, and was said to have taken a long journey over a fasl case, into that part of the country still under Turkish domination.

This was not much to go upon. I had no proof that Daghar was guilty, nor had I the man himself to interrogate; and heartily I wished that I had never given Haji Sa'ad's buffaloes to the fat Basrawi—for that was what it amounted to. Hoping, Micawber-like, that something

would turn up, I sent the old man home, telling him to be ready to come in when sent for.

Nothing did turn up, however, except an idea in my mind that, as Ali bin Musa had lent a hand once in this case, he might do so again. Accordingly, I called in the headmen of the Metafar tribe, who were living under a neighbouring shaikh, and told them that a member of their Bait, by name Daghar, was suspected of stealing £T400.

Loud were their denials and indignant their protestations of complete ignorance of any such robbery.

Were they prepared to swear, I asked, that they knew nothing of it?

Still louder cries of outraged innocence greeted the question.

"A curse be upon me if I am even acquainted with this man Daghar," cried one.

"W'Allah wa b'Illah wa t'Illah—I know nought of the matter," swore another, while a third lifted hands of pious horror to heaven.

Waiting until the hubbub had subsided, I played my only card. Either they must swear, at the tomb of the holy son of Musa, that they knew nothing of the theft, or one of their number must remain in prison until the culprit and the money were produced.

Ali did not fail me. Amid silence and downcast looks one of the headmen spoke.

"We cannot swear," he said.

"Then you," I answered, pointing to the man nearest me, "must stay in jail while the others return to send me the thief and the money."

"Let me stay in his stead," said one of the others.

"Why?" I asked, and the answer was a definite admission.

"Daghar is my cousin, and will be willing more readily to restore the money on my behalf."

The headmen departed, and a few days later produced before me the thief, and a bundle of coins tied up in a red-checked kafiyah. Daghar was a good-looking scoundrel, tall, and well set up. He smiled engagingly, showing a flawless set of white teeth, when I asked if he had had any other motive for the theft than that of mere cupidity.

"What would you?" he said. "My father was a thief, and my grandfather, and the grandfather of my grandfather. But now, O Hakim," he added, making a virtue of necessity, "I have brought back what I stole."

I let him off lightly, for I always had a feeling that it was taking a mean advantage to inflict full punishment on a man whom I could not have convicted without supernatural assistance. But the sanctity of Ali's bones had none the less availed to settle the case satisfactorily, from the point of view of every one con-

cerned. Jaafer's loss had already been made good. Shaikh Shibal now returned the confiscated buffaloes to Haji Sa'ad, and in his turn was compensated by the money retrieved from the thief — and all was well.

"The evil that men do lives after them,
The good is oft interred with their bones."

Certainly, in a sense other than that intended by Mark Antony, the second line is true of Ali bin Musa!

MUSINGS WITHOUT METHOD.

PEACE IN IRELAND—KIDNAPPING AND MURDER—"REGRETTABLE INCIDENTS"—IS MR LLOYD GEORGE INDISPENSABLE?—THE CONTENTED MR MONTAGU—THE CHARACTER OF THE TRUE LEADER—THE STUDY OF ENGLISH—A POOR DISCIPLINE—THE PROLETARIAN SCHOOL.

WHEN the Houses of Parliament met in the early days of February, there were already signs of disagreement in the country. The persistent policy of self-praise had not wholly succeeded. We had been told by Mr Lloyd George's faithful henchmen that their revered leader was the greatest man in Europe, that his influence dominated the councils of Europe, and the rest of it, and we had been told these things in vain. The Coalition has been in office for more than three years, and it has given its proofs, which few save the office-seekers deemed satisfactory. On a sudden it became clear that whatever Mr Lloyd George's Government had touched had been besmirched with failure. Elsewhere than at Washington, where Mr Balfour's authority and sound method met with their due success, was writ large a record of disaster. Sir George Younger's refusal to permit a General Election was a blow both to the hopes and the prestige of Mr Lloyd George, who, deeming himself an untrammelled autocrat, thought that no dog should bark when he oped his mouth. It was his business, he believed, to call an election when he chose. It was the business of the Commons and the country tamely to acquiesce in his decision. And Parliament met, and all seemed changed.

Already there was more than one candidate in the field against him. Mr Asquith was offering in the market-place to any one who would accept them the timid platitudes which have served him for many a long year. He was resolute to wait and see as ever he was in his life. Viscount Grey and Lord Robert Cecil, carrying far more weight than Mr Asquith, were prepared to coalesce with whomever would follow them. But they were all three like deserted cheap-jacks at a fair. They acclaimed the virtue of their wares, but none would exchange his penny for their wisdom. They produced but one solid effect: they succeeded in putting into a bad temper Mr Lloyd George and his braves. Lord Birkenhead and Mr Churchill were abusive, after their wont. The one made an attack upon Viscount Grey, which might with equal justice have been aimed at Mr Lloyd George, while Mr

Churchill attempted to dismiss Lord Robert Cecil with a sneer, and was properly trounced for his pains. The greatest leader of all time, the one eminent man in Europe and the world, our Prime Minister himself, mingled apologies with his anger. He pleaded in excuse for his failures the high-strung nerves which were the result of the war. He insisted that good would speedily come of the discussions which were being held by Sir James Craig and Michael Collins. His optimism was as futile as his apology. The whole virtue, which consisted not in policy, not in understanding, but in the management of the House of Commons, seemed to have gone out of him. And even if he had had any chance of restoring confidence in himself, that chance was destroyed by the attack made upon the tiresome loyalists of Northern Ireland by his friends of the I.R.A.

That the Sinn Feiners should thus imperil the "Treaty" which was to cut them adrift from Great Britain must have been indeed mortifying to the politicians, who, in the devout belief that they were constructive statesmen, had exchanged telegrams with one another and with the Dominions oversea. The scoundrels who thus chose to prove themselves incapable of governing Southern Ireland or anything else crossed the Ulster frontier in cars, which seem to have been supplied by the British Government. They kidnapped sixty loyal citizens and killed at least one policeman, — they have added to their bag since. And their crimes were described in such terms as prove how deeply we have sunk into the bog of cowardice and condonation. Michael Collins, of course, considered the assault "natural." We suppose that means that he would have done the thing himself had he not been endued with a brief authority. At any rate, this is what he said: "It was what I feared, and what any sensible person would expect. Naturally the people, whose feelings were outraged by the impending executions, would take some action of this kind. The blame lies with the people who delayed until the last moment giving a decision as to the fate of these men in Derry gaol." How swift has been our descent! It comes to this, that no "sensible man" could have doubt that the I.R.A. would forbid the proper punishment of murderers. The slaughter of the warders in Derry gaol was a peculiarly brutal crime, even for the Sinn Feiners. But the murderers must be enlarged at the mere threat of revenge. No thought must be given to the victims, who were merely doing their duty. They should not have interfered with the imperious orders of their prisoners. And the Lord-Lieutenant, "naturally" also, should not have been guilty of an hour's delay in setting free the murderers. We believe that he was not guilty

of delay in obeying the commands of Sinn Fein. And it may be that the raid into Ulster was merely an "incident" in a settled policy of intimidation.

But the raid and Collins's comment upon it proves once again, what should have been obvious to all, that self-government in Southern Ireland means terrorism and nothing more. Henceforth it is evident that no man may be punished for murder in Ireland if he belong to the sacred band of Sinn Feiners. The gravest crimes—murder, kidnapping, arson, and theft—are considered by the governors of Southern Ireland as the "natural" consequences of the administration of law. Whither, then, will Mr Lloyd George's boasted settlement lead us? To civil war, bitter and unceasing. If Collins did not take a grave view of the crime, his friends and colleagues in England were no less complacent. Mr Chamberlain's comment is worth remembering. "I am afraid," said the Leader of the Commons, "that it was to be expected that in the troubled condition of things after the fierce conflict which was waged, we should not, even under the happier auspices of the truce and Treaty, arrive at a permanent solution without regrettable incidents." Really! And Mr Chamberlain went on to confess that this incident was "grave and most regrettable." Indeed it must have been "regrettable" for the family of the gallant man who was murdered, "regrettable" also for the loyal Ulstermen who were dragged from their houses and kidnapped. But does Mr Chamberlain think that "regrettable" is a severe enough word for the state of anarchy which he and his colleagues have brought about in Ireland? To us it seems that words have lost all their meaning upon the flippant tongues of politicians. "Regrettable," indeed, is a poor comment upon a foul act of war, committed in a time of truce and on the morrow of signing a "Treaty." But we suppose that the Government is afraid of hurting the feelings of the criminals. We are sure that the criminals will never be punished, and that the loyal citizens of Ulster are not likely to be efficiently protected, unless they take the work into their own hands. What trust can be put in a Government which is afraid to thank our British soldiers for their services, because to thank them would disturb "the harmony." What harmony, we wonder, and where is it to be observed? And what honour will be paid, we should like to know, to those who are responsible for the "regrettable" incident?

Thus outrage has followed outrage in Ireland without redress. After the kidnapping came the brutal, cold-blooded murder at Clones of four special constables and the callous wounding of many more. Perhaps these incidents also were "regrettable," as Mr Cham-

berlain might say, or in Mr Churchill's sublime words, "in some respects ridiculous." But they give little hope of peace in Ireland, and they prove the worthlessness of the noisy praise lavished upon Mr Lloyd George by himself and his friends. Meanwhile there is a larger, more important question to be answered, and it is this: has the British Government made up its mind to rule the Empire no longer? It is mere waste of time for Lord Birkenhead to attack the Labour Party. He cannot divert the brick-bats which will presently fall upon his head and the heads of his fellow-delinquents by setting up an Aunt Sally of that kind. It is a mere waste of time also to discuss the reform of the House of Lords. We shall need no House of Lords, nor a House of Commons either, if, in their levity and hatred of responsibility, our Ministers stand tamely by while the British Empire is destroyed piecemeal. Therefore we should like to hear from Mr Lloyd George whether he has formally renounced the task of government, and is content to see Ireland, India, and Egypt converted into shambles.

And the key of the situation is Ireland. Our pitiful surrender there has had its effect all the world over. If we succumb as near home as Ireland is to the revolver and the bomb, we cannot hope to guard the Empire which we won by the sword. The sin of cowardice is the most utterly despicable of all sins. Men and nations scream aloud for self-government when they see their duly appointed governors shaking in their shoes. Think for a minute what we have tolerated, what we still tolerate in Ireland. We permit assassins to walk abroad without let or hindrance. If we have not furnished them with arms, we allow them to carry those which they have stolen, and we ask no questions. If, greatly daring, we arrest and condemn a murderer, we enlarge him and give him a free pardon at the first hint of blackmail. We have managed the business so well that there is no crime for which a Sinn Feiner may now be punished. We are opening the doors of English prisons, as we have opened the doors of Irish prisons, to all the rascals who followed their trade of destruction in England (or in Ireland) under the hollow hypocritical pretence that their crime was political. Is it any wonder, then, that we appear despicable in the eyes of the world?

Let it be remembered, too, that the murderers are careful to run as little risk as possible. They have no more courage than our present Government. They slink and they hide behind hedges. They wreak their vengeance upon horses and cattle. When they thought to prove their gallantry at Clones, they attacked a body of special constables, who were changing trains, with a machine-

gun hidden upon a bridge, and they gave no warning. Even if the murderers of the constables are caught, it will be impossible, after all that has gone before, to punish them; and even if the Provisional Government were sincere in its desire to suppress crime, the republicans would take care that they failed in the attempt. The one achievement, upon which Mr Lloyd George may now be congratulated, has been to produce complete anarchy, unless he takes credit for the "amnesty" which Collins, the momentary chief of the Provisional Government, proclaimed, in his sovereign mercy, and bade to be extended "to all members of the naval, military, police, or Civil Services of the British Government, and all other persons by whom acts of hostility against the Irish people were committed." Such insolence as this savours of comic opera, and yet Mr Churchill accepted it with gratitude, and no doubt it brought a vast comfort to the breasts of Mr Lloyd George and his faithful Lord Chancellor.

At all hazards an end should be put to this anarchy. If our present Government refuses or is unable to punish crime and to uphold the sanctity of the law, then it should make way for others who are not afraid to perform their elementary duties. The Houses of Parliament should have no other business than the restoration of law and order in Ireland. The Coalition, which is responsible for this disastrous policy of drift, must be attacked until it breaks up in disgrace, or gives proof of a changed heart or a high courage. That it could ever give proof of a high courage may be doubted. Even now its members are far busier in finding a spot where they may fall soft, in devising the proper hour for a General Election, in inventing a "cry" which might rally their scattered supporters, than in upholding their shattered dignity in Ireland, in India, and in Egypt. Frivolous to the end, they play the easier parts of politicians when they should show themselves statesmen, and as yet they do not realise the passion of contempt which is gathering greater force in the country every day.

Our Ministers, indeed, still cling to the hope that they are indispensable. They are obsessed by the same illusion which brought Mr Asquith's long period of supremacy to a sudden end. In their belief, the world would fall in pieces if they were not there to misdirect it. They are bloodthirsty in their attachment to office. But, to paraphrase a passage by Matthew Arnold, even if they went, "the great mundane movement would still go on, the gravel walks of their villas would still be rolled, dividends would still be paid at the bank, omnibuses would still run, there would still be the old crush at the corner of Fenchurch Street." They are

unable to believe this. They cannot think that they are not necessary. And yet their experience of politics should have taught them that incompetence and cunning are never indispensable. They appeal, as a reason for their continuance in office, to the fact that the Empire is everywhere divided against itself, and they do not understand that for that very reason they should instantly be gone. Whose fault is it that Ireland has for some years been deprived of government? The Coalition's. Who decreed that there should be revolution and bloodshed in India? Mr Montagu, the friend of that distinguished oriental, Gandhi, the Minister whose deliberate policy it was to arouse India out of her pathetic contentment. In this policy he has succeeded perhaps beyond his hopes, and, we wonder, is he satisfied? Is he filled with contentment himself, as he views the joyous —not pathetic—discontent of India? Truly he cannot have it both ways, and if he were not a politician, he might regret the easy dangerous words he has spoken, the acts of pusillanimity which he has committed. And, lastly, whose fault is it that Egypt is in a state of riot and disorder? The Coalition's, which has never been able to discover a fixed policy and stick to it, which cannot agree even with itself, which blows hot and cold on alternate days, and hopes that accident may succeed where foresight is wanting. Yet it is the Coalition which, in spite of everything that it has done and left undone, still clamours that it is indispensable!

What we want in the Government which shall take the place of the Coalition is honesty and plain dealing. If Messrs Lloyd George and Mr Churchill are clever, we do not ask for cleverness in our rulers. Simplicity, straightforwardness, and a sense of tradition are the true qualities of a statesman. We have in our mind the man whom we would choose to be our Prime Minister. He is a Unionist, who has been, and still is, ready to sacrifice himself for the cause which he has at heart—who is incapable of turning a sudden somersault because he thought it opportune or expedient—an orator who uses words to explain, not to veil his meaning. And if he came to our help, he would save, if it be not too late, our ancient constitution. He would know that the duty of a Prime Minister is the duty of a chairman of a supreme Committee, not the duty of a maid-of-all-work. One of the many weaknesses of Mr Lloyd George is that he has taken upon himself the task which should have been performed by the heads of the departments. How far we have travelled in the last forty years from a wholesome convention you may see if you compare the state of affairs which prevailed when Disraeli was Prime Minister with that which prevails to-day. Disraeli was not closely in sym-

pathy or agreement with Lord Derby, his Foreign Secretary. He did not therefore ease him of his responsibility. He heard him patiently, let him go his way as far as was safe, and then parted company with him. Mr Lloyd George, on the other hand, has the ambition of an autocrat. He must be his own Secretary of State, at home and abroad. He must represent the country at every conference which is held on foreign affairs. He wanders about with his horde of private secretaries, like the chief of a travelling circus, and he appears to have an ingenuous belief that a thing must be well done because he has done it. And his ignorance is invincible. Such a Prime Minister we hope never to see again. But there is an alternative, and if he come to our aid, we shall not fear either the rebel within our gates nor the enemy without.

Here, then, lies our difficulty: we are governed by men who care not for the art which they should practise, and who take their opinions ready-made from the vast rabble of the voters. We have given the franchise to many thousands of men and women who made no demand for it, who are indifferent to it now they have got it, and who, if ever they learn to exercise it, will do their utmost to destroy the Empire. And, according to their wont, the politicians begin, too late, to try to mitigate their folly. We must educate our masters, they cry, as though education could be administered like a drug which is warranted to produce an instant effect. Even if the character and temper of the English were favourable to success of this sort, it would take a hundred years to instil the rudiments into the mass of the people. Education has been compulsory for half a century, and we are —perhaps happily—as far from being an educated proletariat as we were in 1870. But the politician must always be talking or inquiring, and so we have had from the Department of Education several reports, which express blameless opinions, frequently contradict one another, and take us no further on the road of an imagined perfection.

The report upon classical education — excellent in the main—had one great fault,— it came too late. Greek and Latin have been driven forth from the temple, and will not easily regain admission. Certainly they will not, if the champions of English have their way. These champions are convinced, in spite of evidence given on the other side, that there is nothing like leather. To the study of English everything must be subordinated— in elementary schools, in secondary schools, in the universities. If we choose, we may return to Virgil after we have read the works of English poets, though "return" is not the word which will be used by our Greekless, Latinless descendants. But if England is to be humanised, the study of

English must be supreme, and the framers of the report seem to think that they will win unanimous approval by mere repetition. We would that they had profited by the example of other countries, which, having changed their system of education, are now regretting the change. In France, for instance, where education is, alas! a branch of politics, and where children will learn and professors will teach whatever is prescribed by a radical minister, the decay of the classics is already deplored. We are told by distinguished men of letters that the new system of training has had a baleful influence upon literature and journalism, that the French language is no longer written with the same scruple which once restrained the minds of its writers, and that the style, once the country's pride, has become careless and confused. The same complaint comes also from America, which cries, through the mouths of Mr Elihu Root, Mr Taft, and others, restore to us our ancient discipline or we perish of illiteracy.

But our champions of English are not swayed by the experience of other lands. They are the slaves of their own imaginings. When they contemplate the elementary schools they see them packed with the patient worshippers of "the beautiful and the true." They do not consider sufficiently the material with which they are asked to work. In their enthusiasm for the teaching of English literature, they speak of "great art" as something that can be brought into the Board School. "We are driven," they say, "in our search for the experience to be found in great art to inquire whether there is available any similar and sufficient channel of supply which is within the reach of all without distinction. We feel that, for an Englishman, to ask this question is at the same time to answer it." In other words, the channel of supply is English literature. Unfortunately literature cannot be turned on, like the company's water, and "great art" is not for the boy working in the fields, unless it is born in him, as it was born in Burns, and then neither schoolmasters nor national systems can help or hinder him. Truly it is idle to expect to find in any school, high or low, the cultured dilettanteism which studies literature as an art, and which the framers of the report seem to approve. Even if so vain an enterprise as the teaching of "art" to children of eleven were attempted, it would be but the blind leading the blind. The masters have a quick sense of the hopelessness of the scheme. Here is what a wise one among them says: "In very few cases is a taste for reading found among trained pupils. It will not, I suspect, be found that the schoolmasters are a very studious or a very literary body." We must e'en make the best of what we have, and this moderate counsel the

framers of the report do not seem willing to accept. They give us no account of the children's capacity to be educated at all, and they talk boldly about "great art."

The truth is that the report is influenced by a false view of politics. The writers of it appear to think that there are "social distinctions" in this and that system of education. Learning, scholarship, poetry —these things have nothing whatever to do with "class." But we are told that "the old education was not similar for all, but diverse." This has been true only since the old grammar schools were destroyed. "It went far to make of us not one nation," say the wiseacres, "but two, neither of which shared the associations of the other." This is mere politics, and means (we suppose) that if all could not learn Latin and Greek, nobody should. A form of intellectual envy not pleasant to contemplate from any point of view, since we do not want our nation to be standardised, but as widely various as possible. Nor is the intellectual envy justified by the facts. Learning, as we have said, has nothing to do with grades or classes. The great scholar is an aristocrat by virtue of his genius, and very often he has not come from the higher of the two nations, into which (we are told) the old education divided us. Porson was no better and no worse because he was a sexton's son. The essential truth of him is that he was the finest scholar of his age. The rest is mere snobbishness.

So we are solemnly told that a love of fine style is "no monopoly of a single class." Who can be so foolish as to pretend that it ever was or could be? If so foolish a man exist, a very little research in literary biography would assure him of his folly. And the report prints another sentence yet more difficult to understand. Literature, it says, will unite us "by a common interest in life at its best, and by the perpetual reminder that in spite of all social differences human nature and its strongest affections are fundamentally the same." He who does not grasp this simple truth by the experience of life will never learn anything of the lessons which books have to teach.

That English would serve us well in elementary schools, were it taught intelligently and successfully, is perfectly true. But here a serious difficulty hampers our good intent. It is not merely that the subject is ill-taught; it is that the most of the pupils are unteachable. They have little tincture of letters in their blood. They have not heard a general discussion of books in their childhood. Those that have a literary sense cannot be kept back or pushed forward by schools and schoolmasters. Their talent will make its own way in any case, and will find a career open to it. On the other hand, whether it

be necessary to force a knowledge which is not congenial upon children who crave it not is very doubtful. The best system of national education would see that those who cannot learn were speedily weeded out, and that what money was available was spent upon those that might profit by it. But before such a system is accepted we must find schoolmasters wise enough to pick and choose, and we must forgo for a while the imbecile worship of numbers which prevails.

In secondary schools and universities English literature should not, we think, hold the high place claimed for it in the report. Its study is beset by pitfalls. If it be taught in the lecture-room, it leads most easily to false admiration and insincere criticism. The value of taste is that each one of us has acquired it for ourselves. The literature which means the most to us should have been acquired, so to say, by our own bow and spear. In a study so intimate to us as the study of our own literature we should bend the knee to no master. The utmost that can be expected of lecturers and professors is that they should tell their pupils what books may be read, and leave the pupils to shape their own opinions about them. And even this work may well be done by the students themselves, if they have access to a well-found library. The things that are told us of books or of books about books most frequently confuse our judgment. There are two examples of dangerous misleading in the report which is the subject of these remarks. In the first place, the report is rash enough to say that "there is no history in which Puritanism lives as it lives in 'Paradise Lost.'" Milton, the man, may have been a puritan in his hours, though Aubrey tells us that he was of a cheerful humour and would sing even in his gout fits; but there is no trace of puritanism in his poetry. He was as studious of the arts which polish verse as his fallen angels were studious of the arts which polish life. When he sat him down to write, he took on a pagan sumptuousness. He decorated his page with a nobility of rhythm and a splendour of phrase which have nothing in common with puritanical austerity. In the second place, the report commits itself to this heresy: the writers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, it says, "dealt mainly with subjects which were of a collective interest to the race at large, and produced poetry which had ceased to concern itself with men but rather attempts to be 'Essays on Man.'" And it says this of a period which witnessed the achievements of Dryden and Pope, of Rochester and Congreve, of Swift and Gay and Prior! Even if we give away the "Essay on Man" and the "Satire against Mankind," what a mass of

poetry is left that concerns itself only with men and women of keen-edged wit and various humour! It is such judgments as these which make us fear the academic critics when they come with gifts of learning in their hands.

Any man, then, who is fit to appreciate the beauty of English literature may be trusted to make his own choice and to use his own understanding. He stands in need of no three years' course, and will be wise if he shrinks from the examiner. He will still find his best grounding in the study of the classics, and indeed without a knowledge of Greek and Latin he will miss in his reading a thousand allusions. Several headmasters testified wisely and well before the Committee. The headmaster of Sherborne appealed to all in authority "not to kill the enjoyment of English literature and English composition by drawing them into the maelstrom of competing subjects." With him we are in complete agreement, as also with the headmaster of Owen's School, Islington, who thought that with an adequate school library and opportunity of free discussion the boys would have all that they need. And the conclusion of the whole matter seems to be that the less highly organised is the study of English, the happier will it make those who follow it.

"There are still persons in positions of influence," says the report, "who are inclined to regard a humane education of the lower classes as subversive of public order." We are at one with the report in condemning this heresy. Humane education knows no class, as has been said before. But clearly it would be far better for the working classes if they were not pestered by inhumane education. Of all the infamous institutions whose object is to destroy Great Britain and the Empire, the things called Proletarian Schools are the worst, and the British Empire Union has done a very useful work in exposing their infamy. We cannot pity too deeply the poor children who are seduced into these schools, where nothing is taught them that is not degraded. Of the silly doctrines and the gross falsehoods which are dinned into innocent ears, not much need be said. They are written with so crass a misunderstanding of children's minds that they possibly do not do so much harm as they might. But from the point of view of taste, the teaching of the proletarian schools falls far below anything that we have ever read. This is the kind of thing that is given to the children in place of the stories which their souls crave: "Thou shalt teach Revolution, for revolution means the abolition of the present political state and the end of capitalism, and the raising in their place of an Industrial Republic; thou shalt wage the class war," and so on, and so on. Now revolu-

tionaries are not made by being bored. It is possible that the children, having repeated this nonsense parrot-wise, would be filled with disgust against it. And we confess that the hymns which the infants are invited to sing are chiefly humorous. What are we to think of this specimen?—

"The proletaire, brave proletaire,
The world awaits you everywhere;
With song and mirth and laughter bright,
The world is free and there is—Light."

Such stuff as this carries no weight or meaning whatever. But it is not the worst that the proletariat can do. There are magazines for children which for obscenity and blasphemy could not be surpassed, and all the publications of these gentry are inflamed with an evil temper and a stuffy falseness which would debase the minds of children if they read them. The wonder is that there are men and women willing to degrade the minds of boys and girls with such rubbish. We know not whether they are or can be controlled by the Government. But if control be possible, then the proletarian schools should be diligently watched. For what will it profit us if we do our best to bring humane learning to the board schools, and are then foiled of our good intention by the gross vulgarity and uncomeliness (to forget for a moment the vile spirit of rebellion which they breathe) of the proletarian school?

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